Kant on Proofs for God's Existence

Kant on Proofs for God's Existence

___

Edited by
Ina Goy

www.degruyter.com

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,
und ich kreise jahrtausendelang;
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm
oder ein großer Gesang.
(Rainer Maria Rilke, *Buch der Stunden*)

Contents

Part 1: **The History of Proofs for God's Existence in Kant's Thought**

Part 2: **A Classification of Kant's Proofs for God's Existence**

Citations and Abbreviations

1 Citations

Citations to Kant's writings give an abbreviated English title of the work and the volume and page numbers of the *Akademie-Ausgabe*, except in the case of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for which the page numbers of the first (A) or second (B) edition are given. Translations quoted are from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, except where noted. The list below gives the *Akademie-Ausgabe* (AA) volume and page numbers for each abbreviated work. Where possible, the title of the *Cambridge Edition* (CE) volume in which a translation appears is also listed, along with the page numbers of the translation. Bibliographical information for the *Akademie-Ausgabe* and the volumes of the *Cambridge Edition* can be found in the bibliography of this volume.

2 Abbreviations

Anthropology	*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* AA 7:119–333 CE *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 231–429
Causes of Earthquakes	*On the Causes of Earthquakes on the Occasion of the Calamity That Befell the Western Countries of Europe towards the End of Last Year* AA 1:417–27 CE *Natural Science*, 327–36
third *Critique, CPJ*	*Critique of the Power of Judgment* AA 5:165–486 CE *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 53–346
first *Critique, CPR* A	*Critique of Pure Reason* (1st Edition) AA 4:5–252 CE *Critique of Pure Reason*
first *Critique, CPR* B	*Critique of Pure Reason* (2nd Edition) AA 3:2–552 CE *Critique of Pure Reason*
second *Critique, CprR*	*Critique of Practical Reason* AA 5:1–164 CE *Practical Philosophy*, 139–271
Danzig Rat. Theol. Baumbach	Notes to lectures on theology given by Kant probably 1783–4 and 1785–6, attributed to Christoph Coelestin Mrongovius (*Mrongovius III*), copied by Rudolf Baumbach AA 28/2.2:1227–319 (Fugate and Hymers 2016, 131–218)
Directions	*Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space* AA 2:375–83 CE *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 361–72

Dreams	*Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* AA 2:315–73 CE *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 301–59
First Introduction	The first, unpublished introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* AA 20:195–251 CE *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 3–51
Ground of Proof essay, *GP*	*The Only Possible Ground of Proof in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* AA 2:65–163 CE *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 111–201
Groundwork, *GMM*	*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* AA 4:385–463 CE *Practical Philosophy*, 37–108
Inaugural Dissertation	*On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World (Inaugural Dissertation)* AA 2:385–419 CE *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 373–416
Lect. Met. Dohna	Notes to lectures on metaphysics given by Kant in 1792–3, attributed to Graf Heinrich Ludwig Adolph zu Dohna-Wundlacken AA 28/2.1:611–702 CE *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 355–91 (selection)
Lect. Met. Herder	Notes to lectures on metaphysics given by Kant in the early 1760s, attributed to Johann Gottfried Herder AA 28/1:1–166 CE *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 1–16 (selection)
Lect. Met. K_2	Notes to lectures on metaphysics given by Kant and dated in the early 1790s, author unknown AA 28/2.1:705–816 CE *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 393–413 (selection)
Lect. Met. L_2	Notes to lectures on metaphysics given by Kant probably 1790–1, author unknown (probably Friedrich Theodor Rink), published by Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölitz AA 28/2.1:525–610 CE *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 297–354
Lect. Met. Morals Vigilantius	Notes to lectures on metaphysics of morals given by Kant in 1793–4, attributed to Johann Friedrich Vigilantius AA 27/2.1:475–732 CE *Lectures on Ethics*, 249–452
Lect. Met. Volckmann	Notes to lectures on metaphysics given by Kant probably 1784–5, attributed to Johann Wilhelm Volckmann AA 28/1:351–460 CE *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 287–96 (selection)

Lect. Moral Phil. Collins	Notes to lectures on moral philosophy given by Kant probably in the mid 1770s (though dated 1784–5), attributed to Georg Ludwig Collins AA 27/1:237–471 CE *Lectures on Ethics*, 37–222
Lect. Moral Phil. Mrongovius II	Notes to lectures on moral philosophy given by Kant in 1784–5, attributed to Christoph Coelestin Mrongovius AA 29/1.1:593–642 CE *Lectures on Ethics*, 223–48 (selection)
Lect. Nat. Law Feyerabend	Notes to lectures on natural law given by Kant probably in 1784, attributed to Gottlieb Feyerabend AA 27/2.2:1317–94
Lect. Pract. Phil. Powalski	Notes to lectures on practical philosophy given by Kant in 1782–3 attributed to Gottlieb Bernhard Powalski AA 27/1:91–235
Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz	Notes to lectures on theology given by Kant probably 1783–4, attributed to Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölitz AA 28/2.2:993–1126 CE *Religion and Rational Theology*, 335–451
Logic	*The Jäsche Logic* AA 9:1–150 CE *Lectures on Logic*, 521–640
Metaphysical Foundations, MFNS	*Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* AA 4:465–565 CE *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, 171–270
MM	*Metaphysics of Morals* AA 6:205–493 CE *Practical Philosophy*, 365–492, 509–603
New Elucidation, NE	*A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* AA 1:385–416 CE *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 1–45
Notes and Fragments	*Notes and Fragments* AA 14–18 CE *Notes and Fragments*
On the Common Saying	*On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, but It Is of no Use in Practice* AA 8:275–313 CE *Practical Philosophy*, 279–309
OP	*Opus postumum* AA 21 and 22 CE *Opus postumum*, 3–256
Optimism	*An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism* AA 2:27–35 CE *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 67–83
Orientation	*What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* AA 8:131–47 CE *Religion and Rational Theology*, 1–18

Physical Monadology	*The Employment in Natural Philosophy of Metaphysics Combined with Geometry, of Which Sample I Contains the Physical Monadology* AA 1:473–87 CE *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770,* 47–66
Progress	*What Real Progress has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?* AA 20:257–332 CE *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781,* 351–424
Prominent Tone	*On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy* AA 8:387–406 CE *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781,* 425–45
Religion, Rel.	*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* AA 6:3–202 CE *Religion and Rational Theology,* 39–215
Teleological Principles, TP	*On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* AA 8:159–84 CE *Anthropology, History, and Education,* 195–218
Theodicy	*On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* AA 8:253–71 CE *Religion and Rational Theology,* 19–37
Theory of Heavens	*Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens or Essay on the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Whole Universe According to Newtonian Principles* AA 1:217–368 CE *Natural Science,* 191–308
Universal History	*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* AA 8:17–31 CE *Anthropology, History, and Education,* 108–20

Introduction

Why should we be interested in arguments for God's existence, and especially in Kant's arguments for God's existence? One could say that arguments for God's existence can help us to discover the truth. They help us to answer the question whether or not God does in fact exist. One could also say that arguments for the existence of God can be used as a justification for our belief in God. They are supposed to persuade the believer. Or one could say that arguments for the existence of God can aid the believer in convincing others that God exists (Holley 1983, 383–5; Faust 2007).

We might just be uncertain whether or not God in fact exists, and really want to know. An argument for the existence of God can make us as rational persons aware of reasons for the assumption that God exists. If we find these reasons convincing, we will accept the conclusion that God exists. The reality we live in will then change from a world without God to a world that includes and might even be dependent upon the existence of God. Such knowledge of God might work for rational persons, say certain philosophers who can be convinced by the logical coherence and strength of an argument. But the strengths and weaknesses of logic might not be equally convincing for every rational person.

It has been pointed out frequently also that not only rational persons but also religious believers are not necessarily convinced that God exists just because the coherent logic of a rational argument results in the conclusion that God exists. Rather, they would insist on other sources of the respective knowledge such as revelation, religious experience, a particular upbringing, canonic books, or authorities they encountered. Oppy (2006, 8), for instance, claims that religious arguments have no power to change or alter believers' already existing beliefs: what "one ought to come to believe under the impact of any given evidence depends upon what one already believes". In a similar vein, Faust (2007, 80–1) emphasizes that "religious arguments are most likely to persuade those" and "will be compelling only to those who already accept their conclusions". Also Clark observes the "doxastic inertia"[1] of proofs for God's existence and claims that "the power of theistic arguments is, in part, a function of what one already believes about God—thereby impugning its success as a proof"; but despite that Clark is more confident about the role of religious arguments since they "may provide evidence for one's belief" (Clark 1989, 60, 67). Even if arguments for God's existence will not make us believe

---

[1] Faust (2007, 72).

in God's existence, they might give us additional (rational, logical) reasons to believe in our already existing beliefs.

Whether proofs for God's existence can convince others that God exists is in a similar way dependent upon the fact how well such religious arguments cohere with other thinkers' overall trust in rationality and the logical form of arguments, or how well they cohere with other believers' already existing beliefs.

The strong skepticism towards proofs of God's existence of both, thinkers and believers, contrasts significantly with their frequent recurrence in the intellectual history of human thought. Why are humans so fascinated and intrigued by these proofs if they rarely provide reliable reasons for our knowledge about or our belief in God? Some exemplary answers to this question can be found in Kant's writings, and the intention of this essay collection is to illuminate them. Kant, as a philosopher and as a believer, has discussed proofs of God's existence through his entire life and has taken different stances on the provability of the existence of God from as early as the *New Elucidation* (1755) and *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755) to his latest notes in the *Opus postumum* (1796–1804).

The contemporary debate has distinguished a large variety of religious arguments for God's existence, such as ontological, cosmological, teleological arguments, Pascal's Wager argument, arguments from evil, arguments from authority, arguments from religious experience, arguments from morality, arguments from miracles, arguments from consciousness, arguments from puzzling phenomena (Oppy 2006).[2] Kant is most of all interested in physico-theological, cosmological, and ontological traditional arguments for God's existence that he describes in his own terms respectively as empirical proofs that begin "from determinate experience" (physico-theological proofs), as transcendental proofs that are grounded in "indeterminate" experience (cosmological proofs), and as transcendental proofs that "abstract from all experience" (ontological proofs) (see *CPR* A 590–1/B 618–9). His own most original and new contribution to the traditional debate is a variety of ethico-theological or moral arguments.

Interestingly, Kant rarely investigates proofs for God's existence for their own sake; his examination of ontological and physico-theological arguments in the *Ground of Proof* essay in 1763 are an exception of this kind. Kant rather attempts to prove the existence of God in order to support more general scientific and philosophical views: In the pre-critical period, he argues for "a conception of God and of this being's relation to nature" that fits into a revised picture of nature as a centerless, ceaselessly expanding universe "which evolves towards greater perfection

---

2 For a slightly different, equally long list of arguments for God's existence, see Swinburne (1979/²2004).

according to physical (Newtonian) and spiritual laws" (Pasternack/ Fugate 2021), so in the *Theory of Heavens*. In the critical period, Kant tries to prove a conception of God that helps us to achieve regulative unity and thoroughgoing determination of our empirical cognition, so in the first *Critique*; or he tries to prove a conception of God that helps us "to sustain or fully realize our commitment" to morality, especially "in the service of the highest good", so in the second *Critique* and the *Religion* (Pasternack/ Fugate 2021).

Contributions to this Volume: An Overview

Many existing monographs on Kant's proofs for God's existence capture Kant's changing views in particular selective ways and are either concerned only with parts of Kant's writings or with certain types of proofs for God's existence and their varieties in Kant.[3] The authors of this essay collection further develop these accounts and try to present a more inclusive and complete picture of religious arguments for God's existence in Kant's writings. The twelve chapters of this volume are divided into two parts, a longer first part with eight chapters, titled "The History of Proofs for God's Existence in Kant's Thought", and a shorter

---

3 To name but a few: Engert (1925), Kotsuka (1931), Cramer (1967/²2010), Knudsen (1972), Schmucker (1983), Waschkies (1987), Michel (1987), Sala (1990), Geisler (1992), and Dell'Oro (1994). Engert (1925) just presents a brief description of Kant's criticism of proofs for God's existence in the first *Critique.* Kotsuka's (1931) monograph is more comprehensive; it begins with Kant's *Ground of Proof* essay and ends with the *Religion.* But Kotsuka presents mostly a collection of Kant quotes and is hardly ever analytic himself. Cramer's (1967/²2010) monograph discusses the cosmological and ontological proofs for God's existence and Kant's criticisms of these proofs. In his view, proofs for God's existence question the possibility of the absolute. Cramer's approach was provocative in the post-metaphysical atmosphere of the 1960s. Knudsen (1972) discusses Kant's views on proofs for God's existence in the *Ground of Proof* essay and the first *Critique* (besides proofs of God in Hegel and Weiße). Schmucker's (1983) well researched monograph covers Kant's pre-critical proofs up to the year 1770. Michel (1987) restricts the scope of his monograph to proofs of God's existence in Kant's first *Critique*; Waschkies (1987) to the physico-theological argument of the younger Kant. Geisler (1992) focuses on Kant's moral proof and its reception. Sala's (1990) monograph covers the varieties of proofs of God's existence and their criticism in Kant from the *Theory of Heavens* to the *Religion*, and only omits Kant's latest notes in the *OP.* It is one of the most serious, knowledgeable, and comprehenisve books in the field. Dell'Oro (1994) is a good example of an attempt to systematically classify the various proofs for God's existence in Kant. But she mainly considers theoretical arguments for God's existence from the pre-critical period to the first *Critique* (the physico-theological proof, a proof from contingency, the ontological argument, the possibility proof, and an argument for the validity of the transcendental ideal) and skips the moral argument in all its relevant forms.

second part with four chapters, titled "A Classification of Kant's Proofs for God's Existence".[4]

The first part, "The History of Proofs for God's Existence in Kant's Thought", comprises essays discussing the development of Kant's changing ideas of philosophical proofs for God's existence from 1755 to 1804 in a historical order. In the first essay, "History and Theory of the Cosmos: The Role of God in Kant's *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755)", **Craig Bacon and Konstantin Pollok** show that there is a whole spectrum of interpretations in the literature of Kant's earliest ideas of proofs for God's existence in the *Theory of Heavens* ranging from a strictly scientific to a thoroughly theological reading of the text. On one end of this spectrum, scientific interpretations, inspired by Marxism, downplay the relevance of or even suppress the fact that there is a proof for God's existence. On the other end of the spectrum are interpretations that take *Theory of Heavens* as a theological treatise, either from a neo-Thomistic or from a pantheistic angle. Bacon and Pollok argue that Kant's way to resolve the obvious tension between a scientific explanation of the universe and the idea of a deity is that the *order* or "systematic constitution" (*UNTH* 1:241.4) of nature is based on essential properties of matter itself, but the possibility of this order must be assumed in God. Hence, as they will show, the thrust of Kant's argument is best understood as being directed against the view that "the immediate hand of God" (*UNTH* 1:333.2) governs the movements of celestial bodies. In fact, Kant's target seems to be an unhealthy combination of the atheism related to atomism—he mentions Epicurus and Lucretius—with an overreaching theism. He argues that the assumption of natural laws that "in and of themselves produce nothing but disorder" (*UNTH* 1:332.36–7) entails the assumption of an almighty God responsible for the observable order in the universe, which in turn "transform[s] all nature into miracles" (*UNTH* 1:333.3). Instead, in section eight of *Theory of Heavens*, Kant argues for an extension of Newton's laws of motion, such that even though God appears as the creator of the simplest, chaotic state of nature, the cosmogony and formation of the *order* of nature should be seen as an effect of the fundamental mechanical forces of attraction and repulsion, without additional divine interventions. What gives proof of God and the purposiveness of God's creation is our ignorance about, first, why there is matter at all, and second, why this primitive matter happens to exert those fundamental forces. On the basis of this creation, we can apply Newton's laws of motion to explain how nature has produced "the inhabited celestial globes, as well as the comets, the useful mountains and the harmful cliffs, the habitable landscapes

---

4 The bibliographical information of the literature mentioned in the following abstracts can be found in the reference lists at the end of the respective essays in this volume.

and barren deserts" (*UNTH* 1:347.29–31). This argument for a lawful evolution of the cosmos, as well as against materialism and superstition with respect to natural phenomena, is behind Kant's famous claim in *Theory of Heavens:*

> *Give me the material, and I will build a world out of it!* That is, give me the material, and I will show you how a world is to come into being out of it. For if there is material present which is endowed with an inherent power of attraction, then it is not difficult to establish those causes which could have led to the arrangement of the planetary system, considered on a large scale. (*UNTH* 1:230.1–7)

Bacon and Pollok conclude that Kant does offer a proof of God's existence in this work. But the purpose of the proof is actually to *restrict* the boundaries of theistic belief in relation to the mechanical order of nature.

In "Kant's Panentheism: The Possibility Proof of 1763 and Its Fate in the Critical Period", **Andrew Chignell** points out that in late 1762, Kant undertook a project that would ultimately come to mark the highpoint of his speculative ambitions. It was published the following year under the daunting title *The Only Possible Ground of Proof in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God.* The main argument of the book is premised on the notion that facts about what is possible and necessary have their ultimate explanation in *actuality*, and that the fundamental predicates or "realities" must be exemplified together in a necessary being.

Kant was aware, of course, that Leibniz too had claimed that there must be an actual ground of necessary truths about mere possibilities. God, for Leibniz, is the being that grounds such truths in virtue of necessarily existing and eternally thinking their essences. But the early Kant goes one step further; he argues that non-derivative but still really possible predicates must be grounded in the *being* rather than merely the *intellect* of the necessary being. The proof thus delivers the *ens realissimum:* the being that necessarily exemplifies a maximal version of every fundamental positive predicate or "reality" (*realitas*) that can be possessed by anything else.

In his essay, Chignell first sketches his reconstruction of the proof in its two stages. He then revisits his earlier argument that the being that the proof delivers threatens to be a Spinozistic-panentheistic God—a being whose properties include the entire spatio-temporal universe—rather than the traditional, ontologically distinct God of biblical monotheism. He goes on to evaluate some recent alternative readings that seek to avoid this result by arguing that the relevant facts about real modality can be ultimately grounded in God's powers or thoughts—or that Kant just leaves the grounding relations mysterious. He argues that the textual and philosophical costs of each of these alternative readings are formidable.

Chignell's chapter concludes with a discussion of the fate of the proof in the critical period. Some commentators think that it disappears altogether, or that it is down-

graded such that it produces a mere regulative idea of God as the most real being. Chignell suggests that the proof survives but that the mode of assent it licenses towards its conclusion changes from knowledge to a certain kind of Belief (*Glaube*).

Paul Guyer argues in "Proof and Belief: The *Critique of Pure Reason* on the Existence of God" that in "The Ideal of Pure Reason" section (*CPR* A 567–642/B 595–670) of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant repeats criticisms of the three traditional proofs of the existence of God—the ontological proof, the cosmological proof, and the physico-theological proof or argument from design—that he had previously made, beginning with the *New Elucidation* of 1755 and the *Only Possible Ground of Proof in Support for a Demonstration of the Existence of God* of 1763. Further, Kant prefaces this with a critique of his own argument in the latter of the earlier works that we necessarily postulate a real ground of all possibility, which had been meant to replace the failed arguments (*CPR* A 571–83/B 599–611). Kant, says Guyer, concludes that the existence of God can be neither proved nor disproved on theoretical grounds (e.g., *CPR* A 641/B 669).

But Kant also calls this argument the "ideal of pure reason", which means, in Kant's teleological approach to philosophy, that it must have a proper use if only we understand it aright: in natural science, the domain of theoretical reason, it is to provide the regulative ideal of the ground for a system of nature that can guide our scientific inquiry (Kant explores this in the "Appendix" to the "Ideal of Pure Reason", *CPR* A 642–704/B 670–732), and in morals, the domain of practical reason, it is to provide us with the ideal of the highest good, the condition in which human virtue and human happiness are conjoined and which is to guide our efforts to transform the natural world into a moral world (Kant already hints at the practical argument for belief in the existence of God at *CPR* A 633–4/B 661–2, then explores it more fully in the second section of the "Canon of Pure Reason" in the transcendental doctrine of method, "On the Ideal of the Highest Good," *CPR* A 804–19/B 832–47, with further discussion of the epistemological status of such belief in the third section, *CPR* A 820–31/B 848–59).

This may make it seem as if the single idea of God is to be replaced by two distinct regulative ideals. But since Kant makes it clear that the idea of the highest good is the ideal of the complete coincidence of nature and morality, thus of the domains of theoretical and practical reason, there is ultimately only one regulative ideal to replace the metaphysical idea of God. The final stage of this argument is only fully worked out in the second and third *Critiques*, especially in the "Doctrine of Method" in the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment".

In "The Practical Proof in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*", **Oliver Sensen** claims that in the "Dialectic" of the second *Critique* Kant seems to present the following argument: (1) Our own reason commands us to seek the highest good, i.e., the attainment of happiness in exact proportion to moral virtue. (2) If something is

commanded, it must be possible ("ought implies can"). (3) But the highest good can only come about if there is an all-powerful, omniscient and just God, (4) therefore one has to assume the existence of such a God. The secondary literature mostly agrees that the argument does not establish a theoretical knowledge of the existence of God. However, scholars point out that Kant intends the proof merely as a practical proof, i. e., as providing moral faith for our practice (Wood 1970, 145–52); it is further said to be a proof that only grows out of a subjective necessity of our pure reason (Sala 2004, 292), and is solely regulative for our practice (DiCenso 2011, 216). Others believe that even that fails, and that the proof merely satisfies a need of an "all-too-human reason" (Beck 1960, 254), or that the ideal of the highest good does not need the existence of God in order to function as an ideal (see Sussman 2015, 220).

Sensen's new contribution to the debate is that he points out that Kant himself added three important qualifications to the premises of the argument that weaken the conclusion: (i) Kant does not believe that reason by itself commands the highest good, but that it is only commanded *if* one takes up a particular *ideal* perspective, i. e., the perspective of "a rational being that would at the same time have all power" (*CprR* 5:110.29–30). (ii) Kant does not rely on the two forms of "ought implies can" that he successfully utilizes in other parts of his works, but employs a version that merely argues that one may *hope* that the highest good can be realized. The argument in the "Dialectic" gives "comforting hope, though not certitude" (*CprR* 5:123.28–9, see also *Rel.* 6:51.18). (iii) Kant does not argue that one *has to* assume that it needs God to bring about the highest good, but that "we have a *choice*" (*CprR* 5:145.2) to assume God or an ordered nature. These three qualifications are confirmed by the later section on the "wise adaption of the human being's cognitive faculties" (*CprR* 5:146.14–16), and they might explain why Kant does not offer the final form of his proof for the existence of God in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, but revisits the issue in later works.

In her essay "Kant's Moral Proof of the Existence of God in the Third *Critique*", **Lara Ostaric** argues that given the partially transcendent nature of the highest good, Kant's proof for God's existence in the third *Critique* remains identical to the one he provides in the second *Critique.* However, his discussion of natural theology in the third *Critique* should not be understood simply as its rejection in light of the moral proof of God's existence he offers in the second *Critique.* While Kant clearly maintains the sufficiency of the moral proof and criticizes the physico-teleological proof for its invalid inference and its inadequacy for offering a proper theology, he leaves room for a complex cooperation between the two proofs.

The most intricate cooperation between moral and physical teleology is the one in which the latter undergoes Kant's proper critical appropriation, that is, where physical teleology does not amount to a mere appearance of natural

order but where the appearance of natural order is understood as a product of reflective judgment and its a priori principle of purposiveness in response to the limitations of our cognitive capacities and the need of reason to search for necessary and not merely contingent relations in nature. It is on this view of nature's contingent fit with not merely our minimal cognitive ends but also our final moral ends that reflective judgment governed by the a priori principle of nature's purposiveness is put in the service of offering a "proof" of God's existence "κατ᾽ ανθρωπον" (*CPJ* 5:463.1–2). The latter should not be understood as bringing into question the sufficiency of the moral proof. Instead, we should think of it as Kant's growing concern with the problem of reason's unity. Put differently, it is not sufficient to be justified on moral grounds in conceiving intellectually that there is God and that nature is created with our moral aims in mind. That which practical reason demands that we conceive as possible we must be able to represent as real and obtaining in nature even though this reality is merely the one "sufficient for the reflecting power of judgment" (*CPJ* 5:479.14–15).

Lawrence Pasternack claims in "Kant's Moral Argument and the Problem of Evil: Authentic Theodicy and the Sincerity of Faith" that recent years have seen a notable increase in scholarship on Kant's 1791 essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy.* Most of this work reflects one of three specific points of focus: (1) its relevance to certain shifts in Kant's views from the 1780s to the 1790s (Duncan 2012, Gressis 2018), (2) Kant's critique of "doctrinal" theodicies, as found in the first half of the essay (Kravitz 2016), and, (3) Kant's treatment of the Book of Job in the second half of the essay (Shell 2011, Kivistö/ Pihlström 2016, Hare 2017).

Pasternack's aim is to examine the transition from the first to the second half of the *Theodicy* as reflected in the essay's distinction between "doctrinal" and "authentic" theodicy (*Theodicy* 8:264.9–10). While this distinction has received modest consideration in the existing literature, it will here be shown to be key to the *Theodicy's* place within Kant's moral religion. For despite the essay's eponymous goal, to bring the theodicies of theoretical reason "to an end *once and for all*" (*Theodicy* 8:263.20), its transition from "doctrinal" to "authentic" theodicy illuminates the difference between how theoretical and practical reason respectively address the problem of evil, as well as how differently the problem of evil affects theoretical versus practical forms of religious assent.

The problem of evil, says Pasternack, is conventionally understood as emerging out of the conflict between the existence of God (as a being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good), and the fact (or apparent fact) of evil in the world. The latter is seen as a problem for the former, and a solution is sought. This articulation of the problem of evil, however, reflects the standpoint of "doctrinal" theodicy, where one begins with theism, finds evil in the world, and thus seeks a solution.

In contrast, Kant puts forward "authentic" theodicy as an expression of moral religion—wherein the agent faces a practical "need" to reconcile morality and happiness. That is, in moral religion, the agent *begins* with a problem, with a judgment as to how the world ought to be, but is not. God is *then* postulated as the solution to this problem, as how morality and happiness are to be reconciled. Hence, in moral religion, rather than finding evil to be a problem for faith, the problem is itself what brings one to faith.

Kant's distinction between "doctrinal" and "authentic" theodicy thus reflects not merely two different approaches to the problem of evil, but more deeply, the fundamental difference between assent driven by theoretical versus practical reason. In fact, the contrast between religious assent dependent upon "subtle reasoning" (*Theodicy* 8:267.19) and the "sincerity" of faith as a response to "the impotence of our reason" (*Theodicy* 8:267.19–20) becomes the main theme of the *Theodicy's* "Concluding Remark". Accordingly, this chapter will develop the unrecognized importance of the *Theodicy* for Kant's moral religion, and, in particular, how its articulation of "authentic" theodicy provides a number of important insights into Kant's so-called "moral argument" for religious assent.

In "Reason's Need for God's Actual Existence in Kant's *Religion*", **Stephen Palmquist** argues against deist and atheistic interpreters (Wood 1991, di Giovanni 2005) that Kant's account of the nature and function of religion, in his 1793/4 *Religion*, requires belief in God's actual existence. In the first "Preface" of the *Religion* Kant rehearses his familiar moral argument for God's existence, but with a twist: morality leads *necessarily* to religion, as its sole teleological fulfilment (*Rel.* 6:3–8). Intentionally avoiding the technical terminology of the *Critiques* (*Rel.* 6:14), in the main text Kant refers only three times to the highest good (i. e., Kant's theory that we must look forward to a world where people experience happiness in direct proportion to their virtue, which requires us to postulate God's existence and a future life); yet his argument aims to explain how religion can be the context for realizing the highest good on earth. The *Religion's* four "Pieces" (*Stücke*) explore, in turn, four aspects of this task.

In the "First Piece" (*Rel.* 6:17–53), in which Kant mentions God only once prior to the concluding (fifth) section, Kant aims to define the problem whose solution is belief in God's existence and assistance. Humanity is positioned *between* animals and the divine; this presents us with a *choice* to make moral decisions on the basis of either the former or the latter part of our nature. We each find ourselves, at the outset of our moral pilgrimage, having chosen to give our animality precedence over our personality (i. e., over the divinity within us), and this situation calls for a radical change of heart, whose possibility is inexplicable without God's assistance. In the "Second Piece" (*Rel.* 6:57–89) Kant argues that human reason incorporates an "archetype" as an "ideal of moral perfection" (*Rel.* 6:61.3),

which is essentially the predisposition to personality manifested as the idea of God incarnate. This quasi-mystical idea plays the role in Kant's theory of rational religion that "effects of grace" play in traditional Lutheranism (*Rel.* 6:52–3). As a moral *idea*, the archetype alone can empower human beings to revolutionize their evil conviction (*Gesinnung*) and become good. On this basis, Kant resolves three theological "difficulties" concerning how conceiving of a good God as *saving* evil human beings is possible (*Rel.* 6:66–78). This same archetype serves in the "Third Piece" as Kant's key to resolving the "remarkable antinomy" (*Rel.* 6:116.20) of saving faith—the question whether divine grace or human virtue must come first. In the "Third Piece" (*Rel.* 6:93–147) Kant proposes a new, religiously grounded argument for God's existence: human beings cannot fulfil their unique duty to build an ethical community without regarding God as its founder. Once we assume God's existence, the ethical community must be regarded as a *church* (*Rel.* 6:100.20). God and humanity are partners in building the church: God provides the "invisible" (rational, "bare") core of its nature (*Rel.* 6:101–2); human beings must construct historical *forms* that effectively manifest this nature (*Rel.* 6:102–7). The "Fourth Piece" (*Rel.* 6:151–202) culminates in Kant's portrayal of authentic religion: God's real presence in the church occurs not externally, through historical forms as such, but internally, through the human *conscience.* In place of power-mongering priests and non-moral rituals, the true church must employ conscience as the egalitarian measuring rod for distinguishing true and false service of God.

In the first part of his essay "Kant on Proofs of God's Existence in the *Opus postumum* (1796–1804)", **Eckart Förster** shows that Kant tried all options concerning proofs for God's existence during his long career, only to realize their respective insufficiencies. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant demonstrated that theoretical reason cannot but be agnostic regarding God's existence. The attempts of practical reason to establish God as a necessary postulate for moral agency likewise proved to be doomed to failure. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* finally, God became an object of reflective judgment, namely, as the moral author of the world in whose will the final end of the creation of the world is what can and ought to be the final end of morality. Yet this, Kant gradually came to realize, has the undesirable consequence that God must undermine the agents' autonomy and rob their actions of all moral worth. Thus, reflective judgment joins theoretical and practical reason in their inability to establish that God exists "outside the human being" (*Rel.* 6:6.9). In the *Opus postumum*, Kant pursues what seems to be the only remaining option.

In the second part of his essay, Förster sketches the path that led to the *Selbstsetzungslehre* of Kant's last work: From (a) the attempt to provide a 'Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics'; to (b) the real-

ization that the experience of objects outside me requires that I have a body; to (c) the account of how I constitute myself as a body in space; to (d) the realization that in this act of self-constitution I experience myself as at once an organism of nature and of my will: "I am a principle of synthetic self-determination to myself, not merely according to a law of the *receptivity of nature*, but also according to a principle of the *spontaneity of freedom*" (*OP* 22:131.1–3).

In the third part of his essay, Förster explores the consequences of this theorem: Because I am self-conscious and make myself into an object, I can view myself from the outside, as it were, and from the perspective of a third-person singular. I can distance myself from myself and command my own nature. For this reason, my actions can be imputed to me. In Kantian terms: I constitute myself not only as an object of sense, but also as a "person", that is, as "a being capable of rights, who can encounter wrong or can consciously do it, and who stands under the categorical imperative" (*OP* 22:55.24–6). The categorical imperative is thus the "principle of unification" of all rational world-beings endowed with a will: "*Every human being* is, in virtue of his *freedom* and of the law which *restricts* it, made subject to necessitation through his moral-practical reason, [and] stands under command and prohibition, and, as a man, under the imperative of duty" (*OP* 22:120.16–19).

The concepts of right and duty would be empty words, however, if consequences were not attached to them, just as a law would be null and void if it did not regulate anything. Although as a free rational being I am autonomous and give the moral law to myself, "[t]here must also, however, be—or at least be thought —a legislative force (*potestas legislatoria*) which gives these laws emphasis (effect) although only in idea" (*OP* 22:126.18–20). "The concept of God is the idea of a moral being, which, as such, is judging [and] universally commanding. The latter is not a hypothetical thing but pure practical reason itself in its personality, with reason's moving forces in respect to world-beings and their forces" (*OP* 22:118.14–18). The concept of God is thus analytically, not synthetically, connected with the moral law, and with the categorical imperative. The question of God's existence outside of human reason is no longer asked.

The essays of the second part of the volume, "A Classification of Kant's Proofs for God's Existence", contain discussions of the four kinds of proofs for God's existence in Kant, the physico-theological, the cosmological, the ontological, and the moral proof. The main question of these essays is whether Kant used the same kind of physico-theological, cosmological, ontological, and moral argument in different periods of his life. Swinburne (1979/²2004, 11) remarks about Kant's distinction of traditional theoretical proofs for God's existence into an a posteriori kind of proof (the physico-theological argument) and two a priori kinds of proof (the cosmological and the ontological arguments) in the "Ideal" passage of the first *Critique* (*CPR* B 618–9) that Kant falsely assumes only one argument for each of these kinds

of proof, and that Kant misses the point that "there can be clearly many different arguments" under each of these headings. The authors of this volume will provide more precise and detailed accounts as to whether or not Kant was aware of variants of what he called "physico-theological", "cosmological", "ontological", and "moral arguments", and whether Kant's own interpretations of these arguments have consciously changed over the time.

In her essay "Kant on Divine Artistry in Nature. Variants of the Physico-theological Argument", **Ina Goy** argues that Kant developed a variety of physico-theological arguments throughout his career since he changed the premises of the physico-theological argument in accordance with his changing concepts of the order of nature. While Kant recognized marks of divine design in the unity of the major mechanical orders of the macrocosmos in his early *Theory of Heavens* (1:228.3–230.26), in the *Ground of Proof* essay (2:123.15–137.7), Kant claimed that marks of divine design appear in the unity of the highly complex minor mechanisms in the microcosmos also, in what he later called 'organized' beings (*GP* 2:126.5–127.8). But although the inclusion of organic orders as marks of divine design improved the strength of the physico-theological argument, Kant, as Hume before him, at the same time realized its syllogistic defectiveness. Its main logical failure consistet in the derivation of a non-empirical conclusion, the idea of God, from empirical premises, the observable beauty and order of nature (*GP* 2:161.4–19). Consequently, Kant followed a destructive path in the first *Critique*, now claiming that the physico-theological argument relied on the ontological argument, whereby the latter was false (*CPR* A 625/B 653), and finally avoided the physico-theological argument in the second *Critique.* But, suddenly, in the third *Critique*, Kant reintroduced a new variant of the physico-theological argument beside the ethicotheological argument (*CPJ* 5:436.3–447.13). Why so?

Goy argues that Kant's new attitude towards the physico-theological argument in the third *Critique* relied, again, on a new insight into the order of nature: Kant's detection of teleological laws of nature and of the necessary unity of a natural purpose. Both allowed Kant to no longer ground the physico-theological argument on a posteriori, empirical premises related to the mechanical macrocosmic or microcosmic orders of nature alone, but on a priori premises instead related to the teleological order of nature and the necessary unity of a natural purpose. The concept of the necessary unity of a natural purpose, though a posteriori and empirical ("being for the sake of this oak tree") implied the non-empirical, a priori necessary unity of all properties that fall under the idea of a natural purpose. Moving the premise of the physico-theological argument from the empirical a posteriori into the non-empirical a priori realm enabled Kant to (better) close the logical gap in the physico-theological argument and to validly derive a conclusion from the *a priori* moment in the notion of the designed to the *a priori* notion of its designer. This

modification allowed Kant to overcome both, his own deconstruction of the argument in earlier works, especially in the first *Critique*, and the traditional Humean criticisms of the argument that Kant was all too well aware of. However, the new physico-theological argument has its own problems and cannot escape skeptical objections entirely.

In "Kant on 'the Cosmological Argument'", **Graham Oppy** claims that in the first *Critique*, Kant discusses 'the cosmological argument' which we may formulate as follows: (1) Necessarily, if there is experience, then the absolutely necessary being exists. (2) There is experience. (3) (Therefore) the absolutely necessary being exists (from 1, 2). (4) (Therefore) the *ens realissimum* exists (from 3). Kant thinks that *the* weak point of the argument is the move from (3) to (4). In his view, 'the ontological argument' is 'the argument' from (3) to (4); and, in his view, 'the ontological argument' fails.

According to Oppy, Kant's discussion is controversial in various respects. In particular: (i) Kant talks about 'the cosmological argument'. But there are many different cosmological arguments; and there are different critical things to say about different cosmological arguments. Some people try to excuse Kant on the grounds that he is referring to a particular formulation by Christian Wolff. But it is clear that Kant commits himself to the claim that there is just one cosmological argument. (ii) Kant's reasons for thinking that the argument from (1) and (2) to (3) is good depend upon appeal to a principle of convertibility that is rejected in standard modern logic. There is no way to patch this problem by tinkering with the principle of convertibility. (iii) There are good reasons for thinking that the argument from (1) and (2) to (3) is simply invalid. Making this out requires careful consideration of what Kant means by 'absolute necessity'. (iv) Kant talks about 'the ontological argument'. But there are many different ontological arguments; and there are many different critical things to say about different ontological arguments. Perhaps some may think that Kant is excused because he takes himself to be discussing the *best* ontological argument. But there are much better ontological arguments than the one that Kant discusses—consider, for example, Kurt Gödel's ontological argument. (v) Kant's claim that 'the cosmological argument' fails because it depends upon 'the ontological argument' has puzzled many commentators. On Oppy's reconstruction, what Kant ought to have said—by his own lights—is that 'the ontological argument' is *part of* the cosmological argument. Oppy will make a case that there is no other plausible way of understanding what it would be for one argument to *depend* upon another argument. (vi) There are good reasons for thinking that the argument from (3) to (4) is invalid. However, Oppy shall argue that Kant fails to provide an adequate defence of this claim. Here, Oppy shall be referring to his analysis of 'the ontological argument'.

In his essay "Kant on the Ontological Proof", **Uygar Abaci** claims that while the literature on Kant and the ontological proof usually focuses on his engagement with the traditional form of the proof propounded by St. Anselm and Descartes, Kant has in fact a broader conception of the ontological proof as a general type of *a priori* argumentation that involves a modal movement from mere possibility (whether it is the mere possibility of God or of things in general) to actuality (i. e., the actual existence of God) (*GP* 2:156.10–160.7, *Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1003–34). Thus, for Kant the notion of an ontological proof designates not only the traditional (Anselmian-Cartesian) proof but also Kant's own proof presented in his *Ground of Proof* essay as its two distinct species.

In his chapter, Abaci will discuss how Kant's approach to this type of argument for God's existence evolves over his career by examining his treatment of both of its two species. This yields two very different stories. Kant's understanding of the traditional ontological proof remains rather stable and his critique of it displays some development across his pre-critical and critical period writings. The pre-critical Kant carries out a single-layered attack on the traditional proof, either by claiming that the proof's transition from the conceived to the real existence of God is unwarranted (*NE* 1:394), or by insisting on his well-known thesis that "existence is not a predicate or a determination of a thing" (*GP* 2:72.2–3) and thus undermining the proof's premise that existence is contained in the very concept or mere possibility of the most real being. In his critical period, Kant mounts a more dialectically sophisticated and multi-layered attack on the proof, combining the previous two criticisms as well as introducing a new line of objection based on his critical conception of existential propositions. Notwithstanding this sophistication in his critique, Kant obviously retains his conviction that the traditional proof is bound to fail. In contrast, both of Kant's construction of his own proof itself and his evaluation of its validity significantly change in his critical period. In his pre-critical works, Kant presents his proof as valid or at least as the only kind of proof with any possibility of success (*NE* 1:395, *GP* 2:77–84). Kant's attitude toward the proof in his critical period is not one of refutation or abandonment. Instead, he comes to adopt a dual perspective: he retains the *subjective validity* of the deductive structure of the proof to the extent that he even declares it irrefutable, but no longer regards it to establish an *objectively valid* existential conclusion.

Abaci will argue that this difference between the trajectories of Kant's attitudes toward the two versions of the ontological proof is due to the fact that while the critical Kant retains the essence of his pre-critical conception of existence, which constitutes the ground of his critique of the traditional proof, his conception of modality in general undergoes a radical shift, which urges him to transform his own proof from a demonstration of God's existence to that of the necessity of human reason's holding the idea of God.

In the concluding essay, "Kant's Moral Argument for Belief in God", **Allen Wood** is looking at the moral argument as it appears in all three *Critiques*, and is trying to get clear both on how the argument works, and on the differences among the versions we find in each of the *Critiques*. Wood explains first, the nature of the highest good we are to set as an end; second, why we are morally required to set the highest good as an end; third, the connection that is supposed to obtain between the existence of God and the possibility of the highest good through the actions of ours that take the highest good as their end; and finally, the precise nature of the assent to God's existence that the argument is capable of justifying. These are matters regarding which Kant's formulations of the moral argument in the three *Critiques* differ from one another. Sometimes, Wood says, these differences are relatively minor, but in others the differences are significant. In particular, the moral argument in the first *Critique* is quite distinct from the argument presented in the second and third *Critiques*.

Ina Goy, Beijing and Tübingen, July 2023

References

Clark, Kelly James, "Proofs of God's Existence," *The Journal of Religion* 69.1 (1989), 59–84.

Cramer, Wolfgang, *Gottesbeweise und ihre Kritik. Prüfung ihrer Beweiskraft* (Göttingen: Klostermann, 1967, 2010, 2nd ed.).

Dell'Oro, Regina, *From Existence to the Ideal. Continuity and Development in Kant's Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

Engert, Josef, "Kant und seine Kritik der Gottesbeweise," *Pharus* 16.10 (1925), 593–610.

Faust, Jennifer, "Can Religious Arguments 'Persuade'?," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 63.1/3 (2008), 71–86.

Geisler, Ralf, *Kants moralischer Gottesbeweis im protestantischen Positivismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 1992).

Holley, David M., "Should Believers Be Interested in Arguments for God's Existence?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20.4 (1986), 383–9.

Knudsen, Harald, *Gottesbeweise im deutschen Idealismus: die modaltheoretische Begründung des Absoluten dargestellt an Kant, Hegel und Weiße* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972).

Kotsuka, Shinichiro, *Die Gottesbeweise in der Philosophie Kants* (Berlin: Diss., 1931).

Michel, Karl-Heinz, *Immanuel Kant und die Frage der Erkennbarkeit Gottes: eine kritische Untersuchung der "Transzendentalen Ästhetik" der "Kritik der reinen Vernunft" und ihrer theologischen Konsequenz* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1987).

Oppy, Graham, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006).

Pasternack, Lawrence/ Fugate, Courtney, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/kant-religion/, last access July 1, 2023.

Sala, Giovanni, *Kant und die Frage nach Gott. Gottesbeweise und Gottesbeweiskritik in den Schriften Kants* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1990).

Schmucker, Josef, *Kants vorkritische Kritik der Gottesbeweise: ein Schlüssel zur Interpretation des theologischen Hauptstücks der transzendentalen Dialektik der Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983).

Swinburne, Richard, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, 2004, 2nd ed.).

Waschkies, Hans-Joachim, *Physik und Physikotheologie des jungen Kant: Die Vorgeschichte seiner Allgemeinen Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987).

Part 1: **The History of Proofs for God's Existence in Kant's Thought**

Craig Bacon, Konstantin Pollok

History and Theory of the Cosmos: The Role of God in Kant's *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755)

To a general audience, Kant is famous for his 'Categorical Imperative' in ethics and, perhaps, for his 'Copernican Revolution' in metaphysics. Kant's cosmogony, by contrast, has passed almost unnoticed. However, historically, the basic ideas Kant proposed in the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* have stood the test of time. In the *Routledge Companion to the New Cosmology*, Kant's early cosmogony—in line with the dominant view of a mechanistic, deterministic universe—is seen as an important step toward current models of the universe. It is observed that Kant

> proposed a cosmogony in which the collapse of a cloud of primordial material formed the Sun and the Solar System—the essence of modern models. He correctly interpreted the Milky Way as the view we have of the Galaxy from our location within it, and (much ahead of his time) suggested that the nebulae were similar but much more distant systems, which he termed 'island universes'. (Coles 2004, 240–1)

However, besides this enlightened view of the universe, in *Theory of Heavens* we also find a proof for the existence of God. Probably triggered, at least in part, by the occurrence of a comet in 1744 that captured the young Kant's attention (see Waschkies 1987, 6–7)[1], Kant deals for the first time in his writings with the idea of God in a cosmological context. Though more elaborate in the *Ground of Proof* essay (1763), Kant sketches here a specific version of the so-called physico-teleological or physico-theological proof for the existence of God. So, how can the two tasks —the development of a mechanical cosmogony and a proof of the existence of God as the author of this cosmogony—be brought in harmony? Can they?

In what follows, we will first shed some light on the diverse range of interpretations of *Theory of Heavens* (section 1). In section 2 we give an account of the cosmology and cosmogony in *Theory of Heavens* in order to demonstrate the scientific merits of Kant's hypotheses without infringing on the theological dimension of the

1 For the unfortunate circumstances of the anonymous publication of *Theory of Heavens,* see Adickes (1925, 206–8).

work. A careful examination of the role of God in *Theory of Heavens* (section 3) will complete this synthetic proposal by making sense of the close connection Kant saw between a mechanistic view of the universe and a concept of God that warrants the universality and systematicity of his cosmology and cosmogony.

1 The Reception of *Theory of Heavens*

1.1 Scientific Interpretations

In the literature on *Theory of Heavens* there seems to be a divide between a scientific and a theological reading of the text. As Waschkies (1987, 3–4) notices, there is a scientific interpretation, inspired by Marxism, that downplays the relevance of the proof for God's existence.[2] The following trenchant account comes from no less a figure than Friedrich Engels who writes in *Dialektik der Natur:*

> The first breach in this petrified outlook on nature [sc. 'the view of the *absolute immutability of nature*'] was made not by a natural scientist but by a philosopher. In 1755 appeared *Kant's General Natural History and Theory of the Heavens.* The question of the first impulse was abolished; the earth and the whole solar system appeared as something that had come into being in the course of time. If the great majority of the natural scientists had had a little less of the repugnance to thinking that Newton expressed in the warning: 'Physics, beware of metaphysics!', they would have been compelled from this single brilliant discovery of Kant's to draw conclusions that would have spared them endless deviations and immeasurable amounts of time and labor wasted in false directions. For Kant's discovery contained the point of departure for all further progress. If the earth were something that had come into being, then its present geological, geographical, and climatic state, and its plants and animals likewise, must be something that had come into being; it must have had a history not only of co-existence in space but also of succession in time. If at once further investigations had been resolutely pursued in this direction, natural science would now be considerably further advanced than it is. (Engels 1940, 316)

The point of this 'dialectical materialist' interpretation is that Kant's evolutionary view of the universe was revolutionary against the backdrop of the prevalent theological accounts (and thus anticipated Marx' and Engels' own 'Dialectical Materialism') while the physico-theology of *Theory of Heavens* was seen as a relic of the bourgeois society that Kant was unable to overcome. This, or a mitigated version of this view, is implicit in some later interpretations such as Gulyga's (1981, 29–

---

2 See also Theis (1994, 85–7).

30, 34), Klaus' (1977, 185)[3], and Biedermann/ Lange's (1981, 16). Buhr (1977, 46–7) maintains that in *Theory of Heavens* "Kant ultimately answers the decisive questions of cosmogony from the standpoint of materialism, despite numerous bows to religion." But the scientific reading of *Theory of Heavens* is not restricted to Marxist Kant scholars. Some of the Neo-Kantians such as Fischer (1898, 154–74)[4], Paulsen (1904, 82–5), and Bauch (1917, 63–7)[5], but also Munitz (1969, xii) and Reinhardt (2012, 182–7) who wrote introductions to English translations, prioritize the cosmological over the theological argument.

This does not mean, however, that all of them would turn a blind eye to theological arguments in Kant's works. Menzer (1911, 319, see also 48–57), for example, relates the theology of the young Kant to the "religious sentiment" that he finds expressed in the famous conclusion—"the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (*CprR* 5:161.35–6)—of Kant's second *Critique.*[6] Kühn reads *Theory of Heavens* as a means to catch the agnostic (if not atheistic) King's attention (the book is dedicated to Frederick the Great) in order to receive the King's support to advance his own career in Königsberg. Arguing that apart from the sheer creation of brute matter endowed with essential forces the role of God is reduced below any recognizably theological value, Kühn observes:

> Through the interactions of the forces of attraction and repulsion rotation resulted and numerous planetary systems slowly formed. The process took millions of years. It did not happen at an instance, as many of the creationists held. Perhaps more importantly, Kant held that it would continue forever. The universe is infinite in space and time. If this was not enough to raise eyebrows in Königsberg, Kant went on to speculate that we are not the only inhabitants of this universe but that there is intelligent life on other planets. (Kühn 2001, 104–5)

Referencing Kant's closing remarks where he speculates about our souls inhabiting other planets in an afterlife (*UNTH* 1:367.6–9), Kühn (2001, 105) concludes that "he stepped over the line of theological propriety." Thus, to the extent that theological concerns appear at all in the work, Kant's speculations take a scientific form that would have been ignored or shunned by the orthodox in Königsberg.

---

3 Klaus (1977, 185) calls the cosmogony of *Theory of Heavens* "one of the highlights of the pre-Marxist development of the dialectic."

4 Fischer, however, observes a Leibnizian attempt to reconcile mechanism and teleology in *Theory of Heavens.*

5 Bauch (1917, 67) sees *Theory of Heavens* as an argument against "Newton's view about the intervention of the direct hand of God" (see *UNTH* 1:333).

6 The most explicit parallel marks the end of *Theory of Heavens* where Kant concludes that "the view of the starry sky on a clear night gives one a kind of pleasure that only noble souls feel." (*UNTH* 1:367.27–9)

1.2 Theological Interpretations

On the other end of the spectrum we find a few interpretations that take *Theory of Heavens* as a theological treatise, either from a neo-thomistic angle (Bund 1913, 93–103), or from a pantheistic angle (Schmalenbach 1929, 77). There are also more balanced, but still essentially theological readings of *Theory of Heavens*, e. g., Redmann (1962, 34, see also 73–110), according to whom for Kant "the scientific question about the origin of the world is subordinated to the question about God," or Theis (1994, 95), who argues that the "reconstruction of the basic pattern of Kant's cosmology and cosmogony has the purpose of sketching the background against which the theological set of problems is unfolded." With respect to Kant's proof of God's existence in Chapter Eight of Part 2 of *Theory of Heavens*, Theis (1994, 100) concludes "that the physico-theological discourse [...] loses its strength, *since it can take place only on the basis of an already theologically interpreted reality.*" Among older studies on *Theory of Heavens* the historically most accurate and least ideologically biased is by Kant scholar Adickes (1925, 206–315). Throughout his work, Adickes emphasizes Kant's metaphysical interest in a unified theory, his attempt to come up with a *"universal systematic constitution"* (*UNTH* 1:237.4) of the universe: "It would be false to judge the work [*Theory of Heavens*] one-sidedly from a strictly scientific-mathematical standpoint." (Adickes 1925, 208) Among the more recent studies Waschkies represents the most comprehensive. He gives a very detailed account of the historical background in metaphysics and the sciences, as well as of Kant's own education; he also provides a very careful, 125-page reconstruction of the cosmology, the cosmogony and the conception of God in *Theory of Heavens* (Waschkies 1987, 486–611). Anyone seriously dealing with *Theory of Heavens* needs to take Waschkies as starting point.

2 Cosmology and Cosmogony in *Theory of Heavens*

Taking into account the diverse interpretative interests behind the aforementioned spectrum of interpretations of *Theory of Heavens,* it seems reasonable to assume a certain tension between Kant's secular and science-oriented mindset, his rational religion (*natürliche Religion*, *Vernunftreligion*), and his appeasement policy towards Pietistic clergy, or religious orthodoxy more broadly. This tension is perhaps best revealed in the following passage that we put front and center, and give in full length here since we will come back to several of its main points below:

If [...] one gives credit to an unfounded prejudice, that the universal laws of nature in and of themselves create nothing but disorder and any useful correspondences that shine forth in the constitution of nature points to the direct hand of God, then one is required to turn the whole of nature into miracles [...]. On the contrary, let us conclude with greater propriety and correctness as follows: Nature, left to its own universal properties, is fertile in many beautiful and perfect fruits which not only show correspondence and excellence in themselves but also harmonize with the entire realm of their beings, with the usefulness to mankind and the glorification of the divine properties. From this it follows that their essential properties can have no independent necessity, but rather that they must have their origin in a single understanding as the ground and source of all beings, and in which they have been designed under mutual relations. All things that relate to one another in a reciprocal harmony must be combined with each other in a single being on which they all depend. Therefore, there is a being of all beings, an infinite understanding and self-sufficient wisdom, out of which nature also draws its origin in the entire sum total of its determinations, even according to its possibility [...]. It is not the accidental accumulation of *Lucretius'* atoms that formed the world; implanted forces and laws that have the wisest reason as their source, have been an immutable origin of that order that had to flow from them, not by accident, but by necessity. If therefore we can liberate ourselves from an old and unfounded prejudice and from the lazy philosophy that tries to hide a sluggish lack of knowledge behind a pious face, then I hope to found a sure conviction on incontrovertible grounds: *that the world recognizes a mechanical development out of the universal laws of nature as the origin of its constitution* [...]. The orbital motions consist of the relationship between the sinking force that is a certain result of the properties of matter and of the shooting motion that can be regarded as the effect of the former, as a velocity resulting from the sinking, in which only a certain cause was needed to bend the vertical fall sidewards. After the determination of these motions was once attained, nothing further is needed to maintain them forever. They continue to exist in empty space by the combination of the once impressed shooting force with the attraction flowing from the essential forces of nature and suffer no further change. (*UNTH* 1:332.20–335.7)

Kant's way to resolve the tension between a scientific explanation of the universe and the idea of a deity is that the *order* or "systematic constitution" (*UNTH* 1:241.4) of nature is based on essential properties of matter itself, but the possibility of this order must be assumed in God. In section 3 we will give a detailed analysis of this account.

Theory of Heavens consists of three parts, a cosmology (the actual *Theory of Heavens*) in Part One ("Summary of a systematic constitution among the fixed stars and also of the vast number of such systems of fixed stars," *UNTH* 1:241), a cosmogony (*Universal Natural History*) in Part Two ("On the first state of nature, the formation of the heavenly bodies, the causes of their motion and their systematic relations within the planetary structure in particular as well as in respect of the whole of creation," *UNTH* 1:259), and the most speculative Part Three, "which contains an attempt to compare the inhabitants of the different planets on the basis of the analogies of nature." (*UNTH* 1:349) Interestingly, when Kant gives a

summary of the content of *Theory of Heavens* in the *Ground of Proof* essay (2:137.12–151.2), he focuses on the cosmogony and does not review the speculations about inhabitants on other planets, but instead calls them "hypotheses of a somewhat daring character." (*GP* 2:69.1–2)

In the "Preface" of *Theory of Heavens*, Kant outlines the cosmological and the cosmogonic purpose of the work as follows: "To discover the system that connects the great parts of creation in the whole extent of infinity, to derive the formation of the celestial bodies themselves and the origin of their motion out of the first state of nature through mechanical laws." (*UNTH* 1:221.5–9) However, in contrast to "Epicure's opinions," according to which there is only matter in motion following those mechanical laws, Kant finds this "unexpected development of the order of nature on a large scale [...] suspicious [...] because it bases such a composite rightness on such a poor and simple foundation." (*UNTH* 1:226.4–7) And he concludes that the evolution of the universe on the basis of Newton's laws of motion is "the most magnificent evidence of its dependence on that original being which contains within itself even the origins of beings themselves and their first laws of causation." (*ibid.*) Hence, Kant's *Theory of Heavens* can be seen as *metaphysically* supplementing Newton's mathematico-experimental approach in the *Principia Mathematica* where he famously states:

> But hitherto I have not been able to discover the cause of those properties of gravity from phaenomena, and I frame no hypotheses. For whatever is not deduc'd from the phaenomena, is to be called an hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy. (Newton 1729, 392)[7]

But even though Newton (1729, 388) does not articulate a metaphysical hypothesis as part of his mathematical principles he nevertheless speculates about the cause of the order of the universe: "This most beautiful System of the Sun, Planets and Comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being."[8] In fact, it is this metaphysical claim that Kant counters in *Theory*

---

7 On this connection see also Theis (1994, 87–9) and Shea (1986, 105–17). For Kant's disclaimer about mathematical rigor in his treatise, see *UNTH* 1:235.6–27.

8 According to Waschkies (1987, 399–439, 491–5), Query 31 in Book III of Newton's *Opticks* was more important for the development of the cosmogony in *Theory of Heavens* than Newton's *Principia*. See, e.g., the following passage: "But to derive two or three general Principles of Motion from Phænomena, and afterwards to tell us how the Properties and Actions of all corporeal Things follow from those manifest Principles, would be a very great step in Philosophy, though the Causes of those Principles were not yet discover'd: And therefore I scruple not to propose the Principles of Motion above-mention'd, they being of very general Extent, and leave their Causes to be found out. Now by the help of these Principles, all material Things seem to have been composed

of Heavens: in order to avoid the "direct hand of God" (*UNTH* 1:262.13, *UNTH* 1:333.2, *UNTH* 1:336.16) and extend, as it were, the "hand of nature" (*UNTH* 1:337.2) as far as possible, he—contra Newton—assumes forces that are intrinsic to matter. This allows for a "Mechanical Origin of the Whole Universe" according to *Newtonian Principles*, as the subtitle of *Theory of Heavens* reads. And it is this mechanical explanation of the universe that functions as the cornerstone for Kant's physico-theo-

---

of the hard and solid Particles above-mention'd, variously associated in the first Creation by the Counsel of an intelligent Agent. For it became him who created them to set them in order. And if he did so, it's unphilosophical to seek for any other Origin of the World, or to pretend that it might arise out of a Chaos by the mere Laws of Nature; though being once form'd, it may continue by those Laws for many Ages. For while Comets move in very excentrick Orbs in all manner of Positions, blind Fate could never make all the Planets move one and the same way in Orbs concentrick, some inconsiderable Irregularities excepted, which may have risen from the mutual Actions of Comets and Planets upon one another, and which will be apt to increase, till this System wants a Reformation. Such a wonderful Uniformity in the Planetary System must be allowed the Effect of Choice. And so must the Uniformity in the Bodies of Animals [...]. Also the first Contrivance of those very artificial Parts of Animals [...], can be the effect of nothing else than the Wisdom and Skill of a powerful ever-living Agent, who being in all Places, is more able by his Will to move the Bodies within his boundless uniform Sensorium, and thereby to form and reform the Parts of the Universe, than we are by our Will to move the Parts of our own Bodies. And yet we are not to consider the World as the Body of God, or the several Parts thereof, as the Parts of God. He is an uniform Being, void of Organs, Members or Parts, and they are his Creatures subordinate to him, and subservient to his Will; [...] God has no need of such Organs, he being every where present to the Things themselves. And since Space is divisible *in infinitum*, and Matter is not necessarily in all places, it may be also allow'd that God is able to create Particles of Matter of several Sizes and Figures, and in several Proportions to Space, and perhaps of different Densities and Forces, and thereby to vary the Laws of Nature, and make Worlds of several sorts in several Parts of the Universe. At least, I see nothing of Contradiction in all this. As in Mathematicks, so in Natural Philosophy, the Investigation of difficult Things by the Method of Analysis, ought ever to precede the Method of Composition. This Analysis consists in making Experiments and Observations, and in drawing general Conclusions from them by Induction, and admitting of no Objections against the Conclusions, but such as are taken from Experiments, or other certain Truths. For Hypotheses are not to be regarded in experimental Philosophy. And although the arguing from Experiments and Observations by Induction be no Demonstration of general Conclusions; yet it is the best way of arguing which the Nature of Things admits of, and may be looked upon as so much the stronger, by how much the Induction is more general. And if no Exception occur from Phænomena, the Conclusion may be pronounced generally. But if at any time afterwards any Exception shall occur from Experiments, it may then begin to be pronounced with such Exceptions as occur. By this way of Analysis we may proceed from Compounds to Ingredients, and from Motions to the Forces producing them; and in general, from Effects to their Causes, and from particular Causes to more general ones, till the Argument end in the most general. This is the Method of Analysis: And the Synthesis consists in assuming the Causes discover'd, and establish'd as Principles, and by them explaining the Phænomena proceeding from them, and proving the Explanations." (Newton 1730, 401–5)

logical proof for God's existence, as Adickes argues: "the leading thought was that matter indicates God as an all-wise, omnipotent creator precisely because it produces so much regularity, order and beauty in the world due to its natural forces and laws." (Adickes 1925, 210)

The basic argument of Kant's cosmology runs as follows. Any matter's motion is bound by laws. At the most fundamental level they are the laws of attraction and repulsion:

> I have, after I placed the world in the simplest chaos, made use of no forces other than those of attraction and repulsion to develop the great order of nature, two forces which are equally certain, equally simple, and equally original and universal. They have both been borrowed from Newtonian philosophy. (*UNTH* 1:234.26–32)[9]

The observable phenomenon of repulsion is the "centrifugal force (*Centerfliehkraft*)" (*UNTH* 1:250.27), or what Kant also calls the

> shooting force (*schießende Kraft*) which would cause them [sc. all bodies in the solar system, i.e., planets, their satellites, and comets] to continue in a direction straight ahead at every point of their curved path and move into an infinity if there were not also *a second force*, whatever it may be, which constantly forced them to leave that path and to proceed in a curved path with the Sun at its centrepoint. This second force, as is indubitably determined by geometry itself, aims at the Sun from all points and is thus called the sinking, the centripetal force or also gravity. (*UNTH* 1:243.13–21)

Like Newton—"I frame no hypotheses"—Kant also asserts that he would avoid "arbitrary inventions" (*UNTH* 1:225.37–226.4, *UNTH* 1:234.26–7). But contrary to Newton,[10] those forces of attraction and repulsion are essential to matter—a Leibniz-Wolffian claim that Kant defended in different ways from his *Theory of Heavens* through *Physical Monadology* up to his mature *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* and beyond (see *Causes of Earthquakes* 1:483.11–487.19, *MFNS*

---

9 In this context the following two passages are also relevant. "I assume the matter of the whole world to be universally dispersed and I make complete chaos out of it. I see matter form in accordance with the established laws of attraction and modify its motion through repulsion." (*UNTH* 1:225.33–6) "I have, after I placed the world in the simplest chaos, made use of no forces other than those of attraction and repulsion to develop the great order of nature, two forces which are equally certain, equally simple, and equally original and universal. They have both been borrowed from Newtonian philosophy. The former is now a law of nature that is beyond doubt. The second, which Newtonian science is unable to provide with as much clarity as it has for the first, I will assume here only in the sense that no one rejects it, namely in relation to the smallest dispersion of matter as, for instance, in vapours." (*UNTH* 1:234.27–235.2)

10 "Not that I affirm gravity to be essential to bodies." (Newton 1729, 204)

4:496.5–512.16).[11] He next observes that all planets and comets rotate around a common center such that their rotations follow Kepler's second law "according to which the *radius vector*, or the line drawn from the planets to the Sun, always sweeps out such spaces from the elliptical orbit that are proportional to the times" (*UNTH* 1:244.7–10), and that all bodies in the solar system constitute an "extended equatorial plane of the Sun" and hence "are related to each other in a *systematic constitution.*" (*UNTH* 1:246.16–26)

Extrapolating from the solar system to the Milky Way and further to "all worlds and world-orders" (*UNTH* 1:311.14, see *UNTH* 1:265), what drives Kant's cosmological theory is "to discover the reason why the places of the fixed stars are related to a common plane." (*UNTH* 1:249.35–7) And he stipulates that "[t]he shape of the heavens of the fixed stars therefore has no other cause than being exactly the same systematic constitution on a large scale as the planetary system has on a small one, in that all suns make up one system, whose universal plane of reference is the Milky Way." (*UNTH* 1:251.22–6) Concluding the constitution of the universe, Kant announces:

> I now come to that part of the doctrine advanced that makes it most attractive because of the sublime view it presents of the plan of creation [...]. If a system of fixed stars, in which their positions are in a common plane, such as we have sketched the Milky Way, is so far away from us that all recognition of the individual stars of which it consists cannot be detected even by a telescope [...] then it will appear under a small angle as a minute space illuminated by a weak light, the shape of which will be round as a circle when its plane presents itself straight to the eye and elliptical when it is seen from the side. (*UNTH* 1:253.19–254.3)

What Kant adds to this model that he adapts from Thomas Wright of Durham,[12] is the *ground* for its systematicity, namely that "those harmonies [...] can be explained by a natural tendency of matter" (*UNTH* 1:223.16–17) itself. Seemingly in line with the "free thinker" (*UNTH* 1:224.30) or the "atheists"—Kant mentions "Lucretius [...], Epicure, Leucippus, and Democritus" (*UNTH* 1:226.27)—he claims "that matter, which determines itself through the mechanism of its forces, has a certain rightness in its consequences and satisfies the rules of propriety without being

---

11 On Kant's transformation of the Leibnizian *vis activa* into a Wolffian *vis motrix*, see Pollok (2002).

12 On the influence of Wright of Durham's *Original Theory Or New Hypothesis of the Universe, Founded Upon the Laws of Nature, and Solving by Mathematical Principles the General Phaenomena of the Visible Creation and Particularly the Via Lactea* (1750) on Kant, see Adickes (1925, 227–35), and Waschkies (1987, esp. 526–34). Expanding on Adickes' seminal study *Kant als Naturforscher*, Waschkies meticulously registers the influences of other authors as well, such as Descartes, Newton, Leibniz, Whiston, Buffon, Bentley, Halley, Maupertuis, Bradley, Knutzen, and others.

forced to." (*UNTH* 1:224.34–225.1) But the postulate of the universality of "Newtonian attraction [and] the repulsive force of the particles" (*UNTH* 1:226.32–227.2) side-steps the randomness and groundlessness of the bodies' motions in an Epicurean universe and hints at a divine origin of this systematic constitution.

Before we come back to this point in section 3 below, we now turn to the cosmogony of *Theory of Heavens*. This cosmogony is an important step in Kant's overall argument, since, on the one hand, his view of the universe is mechanistic but at the same time dynamical, i.e., evolutionary. Hence this latter aspect needs to be accounted for separately. On the other hand, as we shall see in section 3, his proof of God's existence relates to the evolution of the universe in an original, and hence potentially controversial, way that makes a clear picture of the cosmic development a theoretical desideratum.

Exemplified in our solar system, the cosmogonic model that Kant suggests is the following:

> [A]ll matter of which the spheres that constitute our solar system, all the planets and comets, consist, was dissolved into its elementary basic material at the beginning of all things, it occupied the entire space of the universe in which these formed bodies now orbit. This state of nature […] appears to be the simplest that could follow upon nothingness. At that time, nothing had formed yet. (*UNTH* 1:263.16–23)

However, Kant continues by sketching the process of the formation of macroscopic matter. This evolutionary account provides the key to the systematicity of all celestial motions, i.e., "within the planetary structure in particular as well as in respect of the whole of creation" (*UNTH* 1:259.6–7). So, starting from that amorphic soup of matter, he writes,

> in a space filled in such a way, universal rest lasts only a moment. The elements have essential forces to put each other into motion and they are a source of life for themselves. Matter immediately endeavours to form itself. The dispersed elements of the denser type collect all the matter of lesser specific weight from a sphere around themselves by means of attraction, but they themselves, together with the matter they have united within themselves, collect at those points where particles of even greater density are found, and these collect in the same way at yet denser ones and so forth. By following this self-forming nature in thought through the entire space of chaos, one will easily realize that all consequences of this activity would ultimately consist of the composition of various lumps, which would, after they had completed their formation, remain at rest and eternally unmoving because of the equality of attraction. Nature, however, has still other forces in store which are expressed primarily when matter is dissolved into its particles, by which forces they can repel one another and, by their conflict with the attractive force, bring about that motion that is, as it were, a continuous life in nature. Through this repulsive force, which is revealed in the elasticity of vapours, in the emission of strong-smelling bodies, and in the dispersion of all spirituous matter, and which is an undisputed phenomenon of nature, the elements descending to their attraction points are de-

flected from the straight line of their motion to one side, and the vertical descent ultimately changes into orbital motions encompassing the centre point of the descent. (*UNTH* 1:264.20–265.8)

Kant concludes this trajectory from a primordial chaos to an ordered cosmos by asking: "Will then that systematic relationship that we considered earlier in all parts separately now extend to the whole and encompass the entire universe, everything in nature, in a single system through the combination of attraction and centrifugal force?" And his succinct answer is: "I say yes." (*UNTH* 1:310.22–6)

Against Epicurean atheists who leave the universe in a random state, as well as against the "solemn accusation" (*UNTH* 1:221.11) from the "defenders of religion" (*UNTH* 1:222.32), Kant's central point is the connection between a Leibnizian dynamical metaphysics, where matter is endowed with essential forces, and a Newtonian mechanics that articulates the most fundamental laws of motion. This equidistance from atheism and interventionist creationism becomes evident when he argues that "a world constitution that could not sustain itself without a miracle does not have the character of permanence that is a feature of God's choice." (*UNTH* 1:311.10–12) Only the kind of systematic motions that his model provides can explain the harmony that we observe in the cosmos, and explicate why the universe is unfolding in the way it does rather than descending into "ruin and destruction" (*ibid.*).

Even though we cannot pursue this in the present chapter, it is revealing to see the development of Kant's attempts at unifying the Leibnizian dynamics with Newton's mechanics taking place over the course of thirty years up to the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, where the focus lies on the conceptualization of matter and motion in accordance with transcendental idealism rather than on a cosmogony and a cosmology. It seems that the development of the 'critical turn' is closely related, on the one hand, to his farewell to Leibnizian perfectionism that Kant has defended in *Theory of Heavens*, especially in Part 3, and on the other hand, to his overall strategy of reconciling mechanism with physico-theology:

> Matter, which is the original material of all things, is [...] bound by certain laws, and if it is left freely to these laws, it must necessarily bring forth beautiful combinations. It is not at liberty to deviate from this plan of perfection [...]. [A] *God exists precisely because nature cannot behave in any way other than in a regular and orderly manner, even in chaos.* (*UNTH* 1:228.3–11)[13]

---

13 See also Pollok (2017, 27–57).

The point of Kant's physico-theological proof is that God is not seen as the "Architect [*Werkmeister*] of the world" (*GP* 2:123.1), as he puts it in the *Ground of Proof* essay, i. e., a direct cause of the order of the universe, since this order can be derived from the forces that are essential to matter. God must rather be seen as "its Creator" (*ibid.*), the real ground of the principles that enable celestial bodies to form that systematic constitution. But before Kant sketches his new version of the proof, he recasts the old one and demonstrates its failure: "if natural causes can be discovered for all the order in the universe that can be brought about by the most general and most essential properties of matter, then it is not necessary to invoke a highest government [*oberste Regierung*]." (*UNTH* 1:223.19–23) He then mentions meteorological explanations for onshore winds that make the coasts of countries in hot zones inhabitable as an example of such 'discoveries,' and concludes that "the proof of the divine Author, which one derives from the sight of the beauty of the universe, is entirely stripped of its power," and that a "divine government is superfluous." (*UNTH* 1:222.15–17) Hence, only "lazy philosophy that tries to hide a sluggish lack of knowledge behind a pious face" (*UNTH* 1:334.22–3) invokes a 'divine government' for the explanation of "special arrangements" (*UNTH* 1:224.14). By contrast, Kant proposes an idea of God that explains the creation of matter but leaves the mechanism of nature intact.[14]

3 The Role of God in *Theory of Heavens*

The novelty of Kant's argument consists in the idea of God that is argued for, and the target audience for the argument (it is directed to the religious as much as to unbelievers). This novelty is perhaps obscured by the mundanity of the argument's apparent structure. Indeed, the basic outline of Kant's 'proof' will be familiar to anyone who has heard the standard version of an argument from design.
1. Such-and-such a phenomenon is well-formed for a purpose.
2. 'Blind chance' could not explain such a form.
3. An intelligence must have designed it.
4. Therefore, such an intelligence exists.

---

14 In *Lect. Met. Herder* (28/1:101.8–9) we read more specifically, "2 acts are required for the creation, when God created substance, and when he created a world out of it [*2 Aktus müssen gleichsam bei der Schöpfung sein, da Gott Substanz schuf und da er sie zur Welt schuf*]." For similarities between this and Descartes' and Maupertuis' proofs of God's existence, see Adickes (1925, 216–7); for Wolffian roots of this proof, see Theis (2010, esp. 28–32); for further references to Malebranche and Wolff, see Sala (1990, 21–35).

The phenomena chosen will be of such intricacy and magnitude that other divine properties, such as omnipotence and omniscience, will also be included in the explanation, and so the 'proof' ends not only in an intelligence, but in a "highest intelligence," i. e., the deity. Kant's very short argument at the beginning of Chapter Eight of Part 2 of *Theory of Heavens* seems to follow this course. The apparent perfunctoriness of the argument perhaps explains why so many commentators have dismissed the theological component of this work as superfluous to Kant's project.[15]

This common view is, however, mistaken. When taken in the context of the work as a whole, this argument is essential for Kant's purpose—he cannot derive his system from the few basic properties of matter without a guarantee that these properties hold *universally*, and he cannot ensure that the relationships he describes hold *systematically* unless these relationships hold *necessarily*. The argument for God's existence does exactly this work: the mechanical unfolding of the entire universe proceeds systematically and necessarily because the matter common to all things finds its own origin in a single "highest wisdom," (*UNTH* 1:223.10) and "divine Author [*Urheber*]" (*UNTH* 1:222.15) who endowed matter with these properties and laws.

As Kant frames the argument, there are two other theories on offer. The free-thinkers and atheists view nature as a product of blind chance, while the pious[16] see the direct intervention of the "hand of God" as responsible for a host of phenomena. Both approaches lose the systematicity and necessity of nature, replacing them with alternate accounts of *contingent* causes (either chance or God's free choice). Furthermore, both alternate accounts make nature out to be unpredictable, since chance cannot form a certain basis for reliable theory, and the free choice of God is inscrutable. (*UNTH* 1:336.14–338.20) Kant's argument is far from

---

15 In his introduction to the 1969 Hastie translation, Munitz distinguishes between two senses of 'cosmogony' at play in *Theory of Heavens:* the term may refer to either "some theory of the genesis of the cosmos as a whole" or to "an account, in scientific terms, of the 'origin' (i. e. the earliest stages of) as well as the subsequent stages in the development of the various conglomerations of matter—especially those on an astronomical scale—to be found throughout the universe." (Munitz 1969, xii) Munitz finds Kant's cosmogony in the first sense to be rather uninteresting; it is "theistic or Mosaic," "conventional," and "reflects [...] the considerable special influence of Leibnizian philosophy." (Munitz 1969, xii) Kant's lasting contribution, then, is his cosmogony in the second sense, and "what he had to say on this score was far more important and original than what he had to say as a "theistic" cosmogonist." (Munitz 1969, xii) In fact, the Munitz/ Hastie edition does not even include the eighth chapter of the Second Part! (Munitz 1969, xxii) See also section 1 above.

16 Among whom we can count Newton himself as well as Leibniz (Schönfeld 2000, 99–106).

perfunctory; it is rather a novel innovation for both natural theology and natural science.

In fact, there are *two* proofs of God's existence in the opening pages of Chapter Eight of Part 2. Kant opens this chapter with the claim that

> one cannot look at the universe without recognizing the most excellent order in its arrangements [...]. The highest wisdom must have made the design and an infinite power carried it out, otherwise it would be impossible that so many intentions that come together for one purpose could be encountered in the constitution of the universe. (*UNTH* 1:331.25–332.3)

This first proof is a compact version of the general design argument sketched above. Kant does not actually *argue* along these lines, but merely puts the argument forward as obvious to "reason" itself. If Kant's "theistic" cosmogony amounted to no more than this claim, perhaps Munitz (1969, xii) would be right to dismiss it as "conventional" and unoriginal. However, this first proof is a precursor to Kant's real argument. It serves not as an answer to the question of God's existence, but rather as a framing of how the question should be asked.

Since it is so obvious that a divine designer exists, the real question at hand concerns the relationship between God and nature, i.e., *how* has this design been carried out? Kant frames the possibilities as a stark contrast: either "the design of the arrangement of the universe had already been placed in the essential determinations of the eternal natures and planted into the universal laws of motion by the highest understanding so that it developed out of them naturally" or else nature exhibits "a complete incapacity for harmony and not the slightest reference to any combination and definitely required an external hand" to imprint this appearance of design upon the universe. (*UNTH* 1:332.4–11) Considered from this perspective, the proof concerns our beliefs about the universe as much as it does our beliefs about the deity; an answer to the question of the existence of God implicates an answer as to whether nature even exists—nature, as an orderly system, and not only as a convenient name for the observable world.

Kant offers three criticisms of the prevalent view that the universe requires intervention from "the direct hand of God [*unmittelbare Hand Gottes*]." (*UNTH* 1:333.2) First, Kant suggests, subtly, that this position puts theists quite close to atheism, as far as a theory of nature is concerned. In his preface to *Theory of Heavens,* Kant distinguishes his own views from those of the ancient Greek atomists by identifying their atheism with the supposition that "accidental chance" and "blind coincidence" move the universe. (*UNTH* 1:227.18–23)[17] This language is echoed in

---

[17] In describing atheism in this way, Kant joins a long philosophical tradition. Philosophers from Boethius to Shaftesbury have defined atheism as consisting in a particular view of the 'movement'

Chapter Eight with the criticism that "[a]n almost universal prejudice has set most philosophers against nature's ability to produce anything orderly through its universal laws just as though [...] these were a principle independent of the divinity and an eternal blind fate." (*UNTH* 1:332.13–19) In this regard, the pious join the atheists in attributing an essential contingency to the workings of nature. Even worse, proponents of a "direct hand of God" relocate this contingency from the origin of the universe to the deity itself. If the nearly-circular orbits of planets are, for instance, a direct work of God and not a consequence of immutable laws of motion, then there is nothing to constrain God's free choice in fixing them just so and not in another way. The ordering of the universe stems from an arbitrariness in the divine will, and in an important sense this means that there is "no reason" (*UNTH* 1:336.19) why things are such as they are. Apart from bare belief in God's existence, this kind of theism largely agrees with atheism.

Kant's second criticism is a consequence of the first: an appeal to the "direct hand of God" undermines the very possibility of science. If nature's harmony results from divine activity, then there *is no such thing* as nature, if by 'nature' we mean an orderly system governed by universal, necessary laws. Instead, "there will be only a god in the machine [*Gott in der Maschine*] bringing about the changes of the world." (*UNTH* 1:333.13–14) Having assumed basic properties of matter and fundamental forces, Kant spends the bulk of *Theory of Heavens* developing a comprehensive, evolutionary explanation for the origin and ongoing motion of the universe. Without these basic assumptions concerning nature's operations, this kind of theory building and generation of testable predictions will not occur, and "one is required to turn the whole of nature into miracles." (*UNTH* 1:333.2–3)

Furthermore, the referral of natural explanations directly to God actually makes it impossible to investigate any case further. This is because the free choice of God is inscrutable; the deity must have some purposes in its choices, but we are in no position to read these off from natural phenomena. Kant offers two examples to illustrate this problem: a calculation by Newton of the ratio of densities for the Earth, Jupiter, and Saturn, and the observation that planetary masses in our solar system increase with distance from the Sun. One explanation on offer suggested that God set the ratios of these three planets to match the degrees of warmth from the Sun, but Kant dismisses this as "nonsense to ascribe [...] to the intention of God," (*UNTH* 1:341.34–342.4) since the Sun only warms a planet on and near the surface, and therefore cannot relate to the entire density of the body. And while the increasing masses of distant planets could be explained as making them

---

of the universe, such that atheism is less a disbelief in God's existence than it is an explanatory move in the direction of 'chance' as opposed to 'providence.'

more fit for maintaining satellite moons (and hence for maintaining Moon People), this same result might have been achieved through other means than increasing total mass. (*UNTH* 1:342.16–343.5) Thus, even if we hit on a purpose that can plausibly be attributed to God, this still would not explain why God acted in this way and not in that way, and so the explanatory trail reaches a quick end. By trading in nature for miracles, and hiding explanations for observed phenomena in the inscrutable intentions of the divine will, an appeal to the "direct hand of God" renders science lost and ineffectual.

As a third criticism, Kant argues that a theory of divine interventions undermines the cause of religion. By adopting a view of nature more in line with the "blind chance" of atheism, those who cry the cause of piety set God at odds with his own creation, and "what sort of a notion of a deity will one be able to make for oneself whom the universal laws of nature obey only because of a sort of compulsion and are actually in conflict with the wisest design?" (*UNTH* 1:333.20–3) In this picture, God must set aside the dignity of a sovereign on a throne in order to always be running about after his children to bring them back in line; but alas, as soon as one is settled, another is out of place! In addition to this indignity, religion loses credibility by maintaining demonstrably false doctrines. If an "enemy of providence" can show how "universal causal laws of nature" necessitate natural phenomena as their effects, yet the pious refuse on religious grounds to accept these demonstrations, then the atheists and free-thinkers will gain prominence. (*UNTH* 1:333.23–7)

Thus, the first proof of God's existence is insufficient, insofar as it makes no distinction between a God who intervenes in nature directly and one whose work is carried out via the mechanical developmental processes of Kant's theory. Having demonstrated the devastating faults of an appeal to the "direct hand of God," Kant offers a second proof of God's existence "with greater propriety and correctness." (*UNTH* 1:333.28–9)

1. If many things exhibit a relationship of "reciprocal harmony [*einer gewechselten Harmonie*]," this relationship depends on "a single being" to ground it.
2. "Nature, left to its own universal properties," exhibits these relationships of reciprocal harmony throughout its "entire realm."
3. Therefore, the "essential properties" from which these relationships derive "can have no independent necessity," but instead originate in "a single understanding as the ground [*Grunde*] and source of all beings."
4. Therefore, there exists such an understanding, origin, and ground on which nature depends, "even according to its possibility." (*UNTH* 1:333.29–334.20)

This argument captures the desiderata of *universality* and *systematicity* in a way that the first version of the argument does not. It is, first of all, universal in

scope. Kant names correspondence and harmony as the key features that require explanation, but emphasizes that these features apply to the fitness of nature for human intentions and "the glorification of the divine properties" (*UNTH* 1:333.33) as well as to connections between non-rational beings. Moreover, this universal harmony derives from nature "left to its own universal properties." (*UNTH* 1:333.29–30) The alternative view, which appeals to the direct hand of God, must appeal to different specific reasons for God's choice in various matters—a choice which, as we have considered above, is often inscrutable to finite reasoners. Thus, while the hand of God appears to serve as a universal explanation, it actually splinters the universe into many smaller instances of harmony which require a variety of explanations in relation to God's choice of *that specific correspondence or harmony.* Kant's argument corrects this problem, and by the same reasoning ensures systematicity through the lawfulness of relations deriving from a single ground.

But the necessity of nature's relations might remain in doubt so long as God's creation depends on God's will, and so long as this will is considered as completely free. This is where Kant's argument breaks radically with other sorts of arguments for God's existence that appeal to the deity's role as creator. In *Theory of Heavens*, it is God's *understanding* that *grounds* not just the actual existence of but even the *possibility* of matter. Watkins emphasizes the importance of Kant's disagreement with Newton and various contemporaneous positions on this point; Kant "understands God not only as the ground of the existence of matter, which is a commonly held view, but also of the very possibility of matter and its necessary laws, which is not a standard position at the time." (Watkins 2013, 430) The explanation for this grounding relation appeals not to God's will, but to God's "essence as a self-sufficient being with a distinctive kind of intuitive intellect." (Watkins 2013, 430) This is different from the two-step view in which God first conceives of all possible essences, then secondly actuates some subset of these essences, imposing order and relations only as a result of active creation. (Watkins 2013, 435) This distinction further emphasizes Kant's departure from his contemporaries, since he is rejecting the assumption of the priority of God's will, instead prioritizing God's understanding. Moreover, the relationship between God and nature as the sum total of all spatio-temporal things is not merely that of a first mover; rather, the essence of matter depends upon God's essence, such that the very possibility of matter is grounded in the unchanging divine nature. God's will as a choice between otherwise open options makes the essence of matter in some sense contingent (as a choice between different conceptions of matter, any of which the divine will might actualize), whereas grounding in the divine understanding restricts the possibility of the existence of matter to this one conception that God actually intuits from all eternity. Kant is arguing for a subtle but profound shift from God as *imposing* a necessary

order on matter to God as *authoring* a necessary order in the very concept of what matter is—from within, so to speak.

With this in mind, we can see that Kant's argument for the existence of God is central to the purpose of *Theory of Heavens*, since it is through this argument that Kant ensures the success and completeness of his 'natural' explanation. Indeed, it is immediately *following* this argument that Kant summarizes his mechanical system over and against the prejudices of "lazy philosophy." (*UNTH* 1:334.22) This centrality is further evidenced by Kant's instruction to the "unprejudiced reader" in the "Preface": "If I may dare to suggest to those who are outraged at the boldness of this undertaking that they adopt a certain order in their examination with which they honour my thoughts, then I would request that they read the *eighth chapter* first, which I hope may prepare their judgment towards a correct insight." (*UNTH* 1:234.6–11)

While it is possible that Kant has in mind those who would be outraged by the boldness of the theological implications of his argument, and thus offers this suggestion as a defense against charges of impiety, he actually directs the reader to that portion of the text where these theological implications are boldest. And it is on the basis of this argument for God's existence that we can expect to attain a "correct insight" into the rest of the book.

And, as a correction to the accepted wisdom that this argument is left behind after the *Ground of Proof* essay, we are now in a position to recognize an important *continuity* between Kant's idea of God in 1755 and that of the critical-period moral argument(s) for God's existence. In the idea of the highest good, the connection between virtue and happiness must be a necessary, synthetic (i.e., causal) relation (*CprR* 5:113.15–23). But this is impossible, unless we postulate the existence of a "supreme cause of nature" who is its "author" and thus serves as the "ground of this connection." (*CprR* 5:125.4–30) Here, too, God is invoked to explain a certain kind of harmony.

In *Theory of Heavens* this harmony concerns the laws and processes of nature itself, while God's relationship to the highest good undergirds the harmonization of *lawful* nature with *lawful* morality. The later turn in Kant's thought on deity primarily hinges on this moralization, both of the conceptual structure of and justification for belief in God's existence; however, the basic function of the deity remains largely the same. That is, both in the pre-critical and the critical Kant, God's existence is important chiefly for its securing of systematic, necessary connections between otherwise (potentially) dis-harmonious, contingent processes. The turn from a physico-theological to a moral form of argument substantially preserves the idea of God with which Kant is concerned.

Furthermore, the argument in *Theory of Heavens* reveals a pre-critical Kant who is nonetheless characteristically *critical* of commonly accepted metaphysical

assumptions. In charting a third way between atheism and theism as it existed in eighteenth-century Königsberg, Kant also distinguished his position from deism. The deity is not *merely* a "cause of the world," but an "author of the world" (*CPR* A 632/B 660); God did not just *make* matter, but rather *is* its ground. Though not a theory of the direct hand, Kant's position surely counts as an argument for "a living God," (*CPR* A 633/B 661) and hence carves out a unique space within theism more generally. In this space, theism is not opposed to a Newtonian, mechanical explanation of the universe, nor does it serve as a supplement; rather, it lies at the heart of a thoroughgoing *scientific* explanation of nature.

4 Conclusion

Thus, we have found another instance of Socrates' principle that the opinion of the majority is not necessarily the best opinion. Far from a merely curious, faltering early step in the thinking of a young Kant, *Theory of Heavens* is an intriguing and in multiple senses *successful* entry in the development of modern science and of what can now be called "Kant's" philosophy. In *Theory of Heavens*, Kant (1) constructs the bridge to close the gap between Leibnizian metaphysics and Newtonian physics, (2) sketches not only a prescient cosmology of what *is* in the heavens, but also an evolutionary cosmogony of the development of all that is, and (3) situates the deity in the center of all, not so much from a sense of theological propriety as from a concern for theoretical completeness. If this 'proof' of God veers from the expectations of the religious and the non-religious alike, perhaps it serves rather the function of the baker's 'proof' of the dough—an essential step of preparation for the actual baking of the bread. The loaves that emerge from the oven of the critical period have undergone an important transformation into *moral* arguments, but they result from the continuation of a long process begun in 1755. Is the physico-theological proof a tired one? If so, Kant's innovative twist attempts to reinvigorate the role of a deity in relation to nature, and hence to enliven the very idea of that nature with which science occupies itself.

References

Adickes, Erich, *Kant als Naturforscher* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1925), vol. 2.

Bauch, Bruno, *Immanuel Kant* (Berlin/ Leipzig: Göschen, 1917).

Biedermann, Georg/ Lange, Erhard, "Die Religionskritik der deutschen Klassik: Eine wesentliche Quelle des wissenschaftlichen Atheismus," in *Philosophie und Religion: Beiträge zur Religionskritik der deutschen Klassik*, ed. by Erhard Lange (Weimar: Böhlau, 1981), 7–60.

Buhr, Manfred, *Vernunft—Mensch—Geschichte: Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der klassischen bürgerlichen Philosophie* (Berlin: Akademie, 1977).

Bund, Hugo, *Kant als Philosoph des Katholizismus* (Berlin: Hause, 1913).

Coles Peter, "Kant, Immanuel," in *The Routledge Companion to the New Cosmology*, ed. by Peter Coles (London/ New York: Routledge, 2004, 2nd ed.), 240–1.

Engels, Friedrich, *Dialectics of Nature (Marxist Library, Works of Marxism-Leninism Volume XXVII),* trans. by Clemens Palme Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1940).

Fischer, Kuno, *Immanuel Kant und seine Lehre* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1898), vol. 1.

Gulyga, Arsenij, *Immanuel Kant*, trans. into German from a Russian edition (Moscow 1977) by Sigrun Bielfeldt (Frankfurt/ Main: Insel, 1981).

Klaus, Georg, "Die Frühschriften Immanuel Kants: Ihre philosophiehistorische und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung," in *Philosophiehistorische Abhandlungen: Kopernikus—D'Alembert—Condillac—Kant*, ed. by Georg Klaus (Berlin: Akademie, 1977), 139–220.

Kühn, Manfred, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Menzer, Paul, *Kants Lehre von der Entwicklung in Natur und Geschichte* (Berlin: Reimer, 1911).

Munitz, Milton K., "Introduction," in *Kant: Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, trans. by William Hastie (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

Newton, Isaac, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. by Andrew Motte, based on the 1726 3rd ed. of *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (London: B. Motte, 1729).

Newton, Isaac, *Opticks, or A Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections, and Colours of Light* (London: William Innys, 1730, 4th ed.).

Paulsen, Friedrich, *Immanuel Kant. Sein Leben und seine Lehre* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1904, 4th ed.).

Pollok, Konstantin, "'Fabricating a World in Accordance with Mere Fantasy ... ?'—The Origins of Kant's Critical Theory of Matter," *The Review of Metaphysics* 56.1 (2002), 61–97.

Pollok, Konstantin, *Kant's Theory of Normativity: Exploring the Space of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Redmann, Horst-Günter, *Gott und Welt: Die Schöpfungstheologie der vorkritischen Periode Kants* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

Reinhardt, Olaf, "Editor's Introduction," in *Natural Science*, ed. by Eric Watkins, trans. by Lewis White Beck, Jeffrey Edwards, Olaf Reinhardt, Martin Schönfeld, and Eric Watkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 182–7.

Sala, Giovanni B., *Kant und die Frage nach Gott: Gottesbeweise und Gottesbeweiskritik in den Schriften Kants* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1990).

Schmalenbach, Herman, *Kants Religion* (Berlin: Junker and Dünnhaupt, 1929).

Schönfeld, Martin, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Pre-critical Project* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Shea, William R., "Filled With Wonder: Kant's Cosmological Essay, the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*," in *Kant's Philosophy of Physical Science: Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft 1786–1986*, ed. by Robert E. Butts (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986), 95–124.

Theis, Robert, *Gott: Untersuchung zur Entwicklung des theologischen Diskurses in Kants Schriften zur theoretischen Philosophie bis hin zum Erscheinen der "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1994).

Theis, Robert, "Kants frühe Theologie und ihre Beziehungen zur Wolffschen Philosophie," in *Die Gottesfrage in der Philosophie Immanuel Kants*, ed. by Norbert Fischer and Maximilian Forschner (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 17–42.

Waschkies, Hans-Joachim, *Physik und Physikotheologie des jungen Kant: Die Vorgeschichte seiner Allgemeinen Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987).

Watkins, Eric, "The Early Kant's (Anti-)Newtonianism," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 44 (2013), 429–37.

Wright, Thomas, *Original Theory Or New Hypothesis of the Universe, Founded Upon the Laws of Nature, and Solving by Mathematical Principles the General Phaenomena of the Visible Creation and Particularly the Via Lactea* (London: Chapelle, 1750).

Andrew Chignell

Kant's Panentheism: The Possibility Proof of 1763 and Its Fate in the Critical Period

Introduction

For much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, there was a story going around according to which Immanuel Kant, like Pierre Bayle and David Hume before him, tantalized pious readers with the occasional mention of God and faith, but was at bottom a fierce Enlightenment opponent of traditional religion. He devastated the ontological argument, laid waste to the other classical proofs, scorned revealed theology, denounced the *Schwärmerei* of the Swedenborgians, and developed a signature doctrine according to which we cannot know anything about supersensible beings like God and the soul. Any mention Kant does make of God (so the story goes) is either a half-hearted sop for pious commonfolk like his servant Lampe[1], or else a wink-wink-nod-nod diversion intended to keep Prussian censors happy.[2]

The past few decades of active research in this area[3] have revealed that this story is, if not entirely false, extremely misleading. In fact, Kant was raised a pious Lutheran and engaged in a great deal of constructive theological reflection during his sixty-year career—reflection that went far beyond the famous "moral proof" of God's existence on non-epistemic grounds. Inevitably, the *way* Kant thought about theoretical issues in theology evolved during those decades, as did his conception of what God is like. It is true that he develops his famous objections to the Anselmian-Cartesian ontological argument very early on: by 1763, he is already declaring that "existence is not a predicate at all" (*GP* 2:156.32). But he

1 This is Heinrich Heine's suggestion (1835 in 1921, vol. 3, 486).

2 Especially Johann Timotheus Hermes, the opinionated Lutheran pastor who was hired by Friedrich William II to vet all works on religion and theology.

3 The reevaluation began with Allen Wood's classic *Kant's Moral Religion* (1970) and continues, fifty years later, in his *Kant and Religion* (2020).

also *replaces* the traditional ontological proof with his own version based on the vision of God as the "material ground" of all real possibility. This conception of God—as the "most real being" (*ens realissimum*) that grounds all possibility—would play a key role in his metaphysical thinking for the rest of his career. It would also deeply influence subsequent German philosophy and theology. Hegel's Absolute, for example, plays a modal grounding role in his metaphysics that is analogous to the role played by Kant's *ens realissimum.*

The 1763 text in question is a book titled *The Only Possible Ground of Proof in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (hereafter "*GP*"). [4] Despite the title, the book contains the basis for *two* closely-related proofs—an *a priori* demonstration from facts about real possibility in general, and an *a posteriori* argument from the fact that the essences of things are "harmonious" in such a way that they fall under one elegant set of natural laws. The latter, "revised physicotheological" proof is intriguing but baffling; so far, it has not received much scholarly attention. [5] The first proof, however, has recently drawn a great deal of interest. It is typically referred to in the literature as Kant's "possibility proof."

Despite Kant's claims to originality, the main idea behind the possibility proof has its origins in the preceding German rationalist tradition. Leibniz states it in his *Monadology* of 1714:

> God is not only the source of existence, but also that of essences insofar as they are real—that is, the source of that which is real in possibility [...] without him there would be nothing real in possibles, and not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible. (Leibniz 1714 §43 in 1875–90, vol. 6, 614 and in 1989, 218)

This passage (as well as various counterparts in Wolff[6]) shows that the main idea of the possibility proof—that modal facts must be grounded in some features of a necessary being—has a pre-Kantian history in rationalist thought (there are also scholastic and Augustinian precedents). This does not deter the younger Kant from making a few key adjustments to the modal theory and then declaring that his version is both new and also the *only* (*einzig*) possible basis for an *a priori* demonstration of God's existence.

---

4 *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration Daseins Gottes* (1763).

5 Yong (2014) and Hoffer (2016) are important exceptions; they discuss this second proof and its connection to the first.

6 Compare Wolff: "[T]he understanding of God is the source of the essence of all things and his understanding is that which makes something possible (*der etwas möglich machet*), as it brings these representations before itself. Thus something is possible because it is represented by the divine understanding" (1720 in 1983, vol. 3, §975).

The main goal of Section 1 of this paper is to rehearse the pre-critical possibility proof and show that the being it delivers is not, or at least not obviously, the traditional perfect being of the classical monotheistic traditions. Rather, what emerges from the womb of Kant's proof, *malgré lui*, is something that he himself regarded as "monstrous" (*ungeheur*)—namely, a being that *contains* the universe rather than transcending it, and one that is thus at least partly extended in space and time (*OP* 21:50.53).

Ascribing a panentheistic picture to Kant would have been fighting words in eighteenth-century Königsberg.[7] But a few early commentators (such as Friedrich Jacobi) did openly remark on the Spinozistic logic of Kant's effort, and twenty-five years later (in the second *Critique* of 1788) Kant himself seems to acknowledge that his earlier argument could lead to a kind of Spinozism. The way to avoid the panentheistic result, he suggests there, is to adopt transcendental idealism (and empirical realism) about space and time. If space and time are not ultimately real, then the *ens realissimum* (most real being) whose features ground real possibility (including possible space-time locations) does not need to be *in* space or time. After considering this anti-Spinozistic move, I turn in Section 2 to a second way in which Kant's proof threatens to deliver a panentheistic result. This second threat is not so easily dispatched, I submit, even in a transcendental idealist context.

Over the past decade, there has been an impressive revival of interest in the possibility proof: scholars have reassessed its structure, strength, and soundness. One of the main items of debate has to do with *how* real possibility is materially grounded in the divine nature. I have argued in earlier work that from a philosophical point of view, the best candidate for ultimate explanans here is the categorical (i.e. non-intentional, non-modal) features of God. I still think that, but other commentators have offered alternative proposals regarding how God might play the grounding role. The main advantage of these alternatives is that they allow Kant's argument to evade what I am calling the second panentheistic threat. In Section 3, I survey these alternative readings, and then describe their benefits and (in my view prohibitive) costs.

In addition to improving our understanding of the proof itself, the active recent discussion has led to a deeper appreciation of how central its key moves are to Kant's thought generally, both before and after the critical turn. There are now entire books on Kant's theory of modality (Stang 2016, Abaci 2019) and I cannot hope to consider all the important moves and developments. The goal of Sec-

---

7 See e.g. Kant's negative marks about Spinozism in his critical lectures on philosophical theology (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2.1052.28–1053.20).

tion 4 is to look briefly at the role that the possibility proof plays in the critical period and make it clear what is at stake in that part of the debate.

1 The Proof: God as the Ground of Real Possibility

The possibility proof can be divided into two main stages. In the first stage, Kant argues that something *actual* has to be the "first real ground" of all "internal or absolute possibility" (*GP* 2:79.31–3). In the second stage, he argues that this actuality (*dasjenige Wirkliche*) that "furnishes the data or material element" (*GP* 2:79.11) of possibility is a necessarily existing *ens realissimum*—and that it is the God of classical Abrahamic/ Greek monotheism. I have reconstructed both stages at length elsewhere.[8] Here I will simply provide a sketch—abstracting from most of the textual considerations—and also highlight some of the key philosophical issues.

1.1 First Stage Summarized

It is useful to both write out the steps of the proof and offer some symbolization in this first stage, just so that the modal-logical situation is clear. Suppose we use 'F' to stand in for any really possible predicate [9]. So the set of F's include all the actually-instantiated predicates like *being fiery* and *being a body* as well as predicates that are really possible but *not* actually instantiated, like *being Lampe's twin.* Now let 'G_F' stand for the predicate of *materially grounding something's being F* (where "material grounding" is just the relation of "furnishing the data or material element" in real possibility (*GP* 2:79.11)—this will be further explained below). Finally, let '$G_F(r)$' express the proposition '*r* materially grounds something's being F.' With existential quantifiers expressing actual existence and the modal operators referring to real modalities, we can then state the first stage of Kant's proof as follows (I will go on, after stating it, to explain the key steps):

---

8 The discussion here draws on (and modifies in places) earlier efforts in Chignell (2009, 2012, and 2014).

9 I will follow Kant in (rather confusingly) using 'predicate' throughout to refer to properties as well as what we would now call predicates (though without meaning to commit Kant to any particular position on what properties or predicates are). In *Ground of Proof,* Kant can often be found ascribing a "predicate" (*Prädikat*) to an object, but he also sometimes speaks of predicates as the constituents of concepts, in which they presumably *correspond* to properties (*Eigenschaften*) of the object of the concept (see *GP* 2:80.19 for example).

(1) It is really possible that there is something with feature F. $\Diamond(\exists x)Fx$ [Possibility Premise]

(2) If p is really possible, then p is necessarily really possible. $\Diamond p \to \Box\Diamond p$ [axiom of modal logical system S5]

(3) So, it is necessarily really possible that there is something with feature F. $\Box\Diamond(\exists x)(Fx)$ [1, 2, *modus ponens*]

(4) Necessarily, if it is really possible that there is something with feature F, then something exists and is the material ground of that modal fact. $\Box(\Diamond(\exists x)(Fx) \to (\exists y)(G_F(y)))$ [Grounding Premise]

(5) If it is necessary that 'if p, then q' and it is necessary that p, then it is necessary that q. $(\Box(p \to q) \,\&\, \Box p) \to \Box q$ [theorem of K]

(6) So, it is necessary that something exists and materially grounds the modal fact in question—i.e. the fact that it is really possible that there is something with feature F. $\Box(\exists y)(G_F(y))$ [3, 4, 5]

Recall that F stands for any really possible predicate. So (6) says that, necessarily, something (or things) in *actuality* materially grounds all the facts about how and by what the F's can be exemplified.

The argument from (1) to (6) is deductively valid, (3) follows from other premises, and (5) is uncontroversial.[10] So the soundness of this first stage of the argument hangs on the truth of (1), (2), and (4). I will consider them briefly in turn, although (4) is where the real action is.

(1) says that it is really possible for there to be something that has feature F. Since we have already stipulated that 'F' picks out any arbitrary really possible predicate, it would be stingy not to grant this premise.

(2) is slightly more controversial: Kant did not have access to later developments in modal logic, of course, and so we want to avoid anachronism. But the idea behind the axiom of what we now call "S5" is intuitive: if something is really possible, then it is necessarily really possible. For if something's having F were really possible, but only contingently so, then there would have to be some sort of explanation of its impossibility in at least one world. But note that the *kind* of real modality that Kant is thinking of here is "internal or absolute and unconditional possibility and impossibility, and no other" (*GP* 2:78.5–6). This means that we are evaluating all and only the collection of predicates "internal" to a being—not its relations to other beings (this is what Leibniz would call "possibility *per se*"). It's

---

10 K is the weakest system of standard modal logic; its characteristic axiom is the K-schema: $[\Box(p \to q) \to (\Box p \to \Box q)]$. Premise (5) is logically equivalent to the K-schema.

hard to see how something could be really possible in that internal absolute way, but only contingently so.

From a textual point of view, one of Kant's summary characterizations of the proof suggests that he would accept (2): "anything whose disappearance would eradicate all possibility is itself absolutely necessary" (*GP* 2:83.6–7). If "all possibility" (which presumably means *each and every possibility*, see *GP* 2:79.20–1) were not *necessarily* possible, then some possibilities could be grounded in the predicates of contingent beings rather than those of something "absolutely necessary." So this passage suggests that for Kant the status of being really possible is itself necessary. He also says as much explicitly in a key reflection: "Since possibility in general is certainly necessary, so is what contains its ground" (R3712, *Notes and Fragments* 17:252.7–17).[11] If we interpret "possibility in generality" as referring to each and every possibility, then this looks like an explicit statement of (2). The fact that in these statements he means to invoke not just some possibilities or other but each one is explicit in this passage:

> *all possibility in sum and each possibility in particular* presuppose (*voraussetzen*) something actual, be it one thing or many. (*GP* 2:79.20–1, my emphasis)

And the fact that Kant is willing to say that "possibility [...] is itself necessary" should assuage worries about ascribing iterated modalities to him.[12]

(4) is the most substantial premise in the entire proof. It says that, necessarily, if it is really possible that some *x* is F, then some *actual* thing, *y*, grounds that fact. Note that this actual thing *y* could either be identical to *x* itself, or it could be something distinct from *x*. This allows God to be the ground of the real possibility of God's own predicates.

We have already seen that Leibniz (and Wolff) were sympathetic to this idea. So was Kant's influential predecessor Christian August Crusius: he distinguishes between "true" [metaphysical] possibility and merely "ideal" [epistemic] possibility, and says that "[a]ll true possibility has its ground in the connection of the possible things with certain existing things" (Crusius 1743, §14).[13]

---

11 Abaci (2019, 121) cites this reflection and agrees that it entails the axiom of S5.

12 Maya Krishnan provided detailed feedback on this chapter in which she argued that it is not clear we should ascribe iterated modalities to the pre-critical Kant. I cannot engage all of her reasoning here, but I agree that the issue needs more discussion, and that it would be interesting to see if we could get to (6) without relying on something like (2).

13 I think we can assume that at least much of the time, the "connection" Crusius refers to will be of a grounding sort.

Kant is squarely in the early modern German tradition, then, when he says that "[t]he internal possibility of all things presupposes some existence or other" (*GP* 2:78.8–9). Again, by "internal possibility" Kant means the possibility something has in itself, apart from any "external" relations (such as whether it is part of the best world). So what makes it the case that Lampe could have had a twin, or that the cosmological constant could have been different than it is? The idea advocated by these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German philosophers is that the *ultimate* explanation of such possibilities will appeal to facts about what *actually* exists. This is a version of what we now call "actualism" about modality: facts about what is really possible bottom out in facts about what is actual.[14]

From a textual point of view, I think it is fair to ascribe actualism to Kant. But it is not entirely clear what his argument for it is. In the early *New Elucidation* essay of 1755, Kant endorses the "principle of determining ground," which is effectively his version of the rationalists' Principle of Sufficient Reason. That principle says that "nothing is true without a determining ground" (*NE* 1:393.23), and Kant makes it clear that a "determining ground" must ultimately bottom out in something actual.

In the *Ground of Proof* essay of 1763, Kant says that he is still willing to "subscribe" (*unterschreiben*) to the principle of determining ground (*GP* 2:158.8–9). But all he needs for the possibility proof is a version that applies to *modal* facts: the *ultimate* explanation or determining ground of facts about possibility must be found in some actual thing or set of things. Kant sometimes makes the point in hylomorphic terms: internal real possibility, he says, has both a "formal" and a "material" element. The formal element is just the consistency of the concept with the laws of logic. That does not require any actual existence. But the "data or material element" (*GP* 2:79.11)—the fact that the predicates are "given" (*data*) in a way that allows them to be jointly instantiated—does require a ground in what actually exists.

More precisely, Kant thinks that the material element of real possibility itself has (at least) two aspects. First, there are the facts about the "content" of the predicates of possibility—i.e. about which predicates are "given" or "thinkable"—i.e., available for instantiation. So, again using Kant's own example, if a "fiery body" is really possible, there must be something actual that grounds the fact that the predicates *being fiery* and *being a body* are individually instantiable (*GP* 2:80.15). But, second, there are also facts about the "harmony" or compossibility *between*

---

14 The "bottoming out" relation here is meant to be neutral between any number of reduction schemes (causation, exemplification, logicism, etc.) For illuminating discussions of Kant's actualism, see Stang (2016) and Abaci (2019). For an argument that what we are calling "actualism" here has its origins in Aristotelian "potentialism," see Oberst (draft).

these predicates, and these too require explanation. In other words, there must be something actual that grounds the fact that *being fiery* and *being a body* are *jointly* instantiable rather than "really repugnant" in the way that, say, *being extended* and *being a mind* are, for Kant (*GP* 2:85.30–86.7).[15]

This point about the two aspects of a "material ground" will be important in our discussion of the second panentheistic threat. What we have so far, however, together with the uncontroversial theorem (in (5)), brings us to (6). This is a substantive interim conclusion: (6) says that, necessarily, and for any F, something actual materially grounds the real possibility of F being instantiated.

Although (6) is substantive, it is not yet sufficient to secure the existence of God. In order to do that, the argument requires a second stage. Here it is smoother to drop the formalizations.

1.2 Second Stage Summarized

(7)   Maximal positive predicates are really possible. [premise]

(8)   Fundamental predicates are really possible. [premise]

(9)   Necessarily, if something is the material ground of either a maximal positive predicate or a non-gradable fundamental predicate, then it exemplifies that predicate. (Exemplification Premise)

(10) Necessarily, every really possible maximal positive predicate and every really possible non-gradable fundamental predicate is exemplified by some actual being or set of beings. [6, 7, 8, 9]

---

15 This point about real harmony is controversial. I argued for it at length in Chignell (2012), and then tried to fend off criticisms by Yong (2014) and Abaci (2014) in Chignell (2014). The details are complicated, but I take solace in the fact that Abaci (2019, 114–15) now grants that at least one of the examples that I cite (the "real repugnance" of *being extended* and *thinking* at *GP* 2:85.30–1) is a genuine case of non-logical incompatibility. He also admits that "one would then think that freedom from such metaphysical incompatibility should be a condition of real possibility." He goes on to suggest, however, that my reading is still "impugned" by the fact that Kant draws an analogy to the way in which "opposing forces acting on a body" cancel one another's *effects* out, without making the body that has them impossible (*ibid.*). But the fact that Kant uses an imperfect analogy does not, I think, undermine the general point to which Abaci was initially sympathetic—namely, that some instances of non-logical "real repugnance" can "cancel" the subject as well as the predicates. An extended mind, for Kant, is really impossible. Yong (2014) and Hoffer (2016) grant the point about the need to ground facts regarding metaphysical harmony, but argue that God can achieve this by *thinking* various predicate-combinations together. I say more about that proposal in Section 3 below.

(11)   Necessarily, there is a *unique* being, *ER*, that exemplifies every really possible maximal positive predicate and every really possible non-gradable fundamental predicate. [10 + sub-argument[16]]

(12)   *ER* exists necessarily. [11 + sub-argument[17]]

(13)   Necessarily, *ER* is immutable and eternal. [11 + *being immutable* and *being eternal* as maximal positive predicates]

(14)   Necessarily, *ER* has an intellect and a will. [11 + *having an intellect* and *having a will* as non-gradable fundamental predicates]

(15)   Necessarily, *ER* is divine (thus, God necessarily exists). [11, 12, 13, 14]

(10) and (15) are entailed by the other premises, so the steps to examine in this second stage would be (7)–(9) and (11)–(14). Here I only have space to focus on (7)–(9).

(7)   Maximal positive predicates are really possible. [premise]

(7) requires a bit of terminological unpacking. A *positive* predicate is one that has (or is logically equivalent to one that has) some genuine content of its own—i. e. it is not merely a negation of the content of some other predicate. *Having the power to speak*, for example, is a positive predicate, whereas *not having the power to speak* is the corresponding negative predicate (*GP* 2:87.33–88.4). A *maximal* predicate is one that has the highest grade—the greatest extensive or intensive "magnitude" (*Größe*)—on a continuum of gradable predicates (one that is not a proper part of some larger continuum[18]). Thus *being omnipotent* is the maximal positive predicate on the continuum of predicates that ascribe powers to a subject.

　　(7) is not uncontroversial: there are complicated debates in the theological tradition (e. g. Ibn-Rushd, Aquinas) about whether maximal positive predicates like *being omnipotent* or *being omniscient* are coherent. (7) was uncontroversial in Kant's day, however: he refers to God's "absolute perfection" as a function of God's combined "realities" in the 1759 *Optimism* essay (2:30.31 and 31.1–10). In *Ground of Proof* he says that God is the "most real of all possible beings" precisely because God has the "highest degree of real predicates (*den größten Grad realer Eigenschaften*) which could ever inhere in a thing" (*GP* 2:85.22, *GP* 2:88.12). Given this textual background, we can grant (7) without further ado.

(8)   Fundamental predicates are really possible. [premise]

---

16 I lack room here to discuss them here, but see Chignell (2009) and (2012) for discussions of the key sub-arguments for (11) and (12).

17 See previous note.

18 Thanks to Colin Marshall for prompting this clarification.

A *fundamental* (i. e. "simple" or "atomic") predicate, in both the rationalist and empiricist traditions, is one that is both *positive* and *unanalyzable.* We have already seen what a positive predicate is. An *unanalyzable* predicate is a positive predicate that cannot be "constructed" or derived from other predicates via operations like negation, conjunction, disjunction, limitation, and so on. Kant follows Descartes, Leibniz, and others in the tradition in holding that in the process of analysis "you must eventually arrive at something whose possibility cannot be further analyzed" (*GP* 2:80.37–81.1). He also follows them in holding that *having a will* is one such fundamental predicate.

In his discussion of the ontological argument, Leibniz famously pointed out that all unanalyzable predicates must be positive, though of course not all positive predicates are unanalyzable. Kant follows him here as well. A *derivative* predicate, on the other hand, is one that is *not* fundamental: its possibility is "given as a consequence through another" (*GP* 2:79.26). An obvious way to generate a derivative predicate is just to negate a fundamental predicate: thus *not having a will* is a derivative predicate. But positive predicates can also be derivative. *Being a university* is positive but complex: it can be analyzed into simpler predicates.

The final thing to note here is the relationship between fundamentality and gradability. The example *having a will* shows that not *all* the fundamental predicates admit of maximal degrees or grades. For most of the philosophers in the early modern tradition, a mind either has an executive volitional capacity or it does not (see Descartes 1641, *Meditation* IV). So although all the fundamental predicates are positive, they are not all maximal (because they are not gradable at all).

Because derivative predicates can be analyzed into simpler ones, their possibility is grounded in the possibility of the latter. Thus, Kant does not think his proof shows that *all* the really possible predicates must be "given as a determination existing within the real" (*GP* 2:79.26–7). But he does think that the *fundamental* predicates (both the maximal ones and the non-gradable ones) must be so given, in order to satisfy (4). Thus:

(9) Necessarily, if something is the material ground of either a maximal positive predicate or a non-gradable fundamental predicate, then it actually exemplifies that predicate. (Exemplification Premise)

This Exemplification Premise, like the Grounding Premise, is one of the central and most controversial components of Kant's proof. I will say more about it below.
It follows from what we have so far that

(10) Necessarily, every really possible maximal positive predicate and every really possible non-gradable fundamental predicate is exemplified by some actual being or set of beings. [6, 7, 8, 9]

Kant goes on to complete the second stage in (11)–(15) with a series of arguments showing that the relevant predicates are materially grounded by a *unique* and *necessary* being—he calls it the *"ens realissimum"* and argues that it is also immutable, eternal, and personal. For the sake of space, I will pull away from further stepwise discussion and focus on the two-fold panentheistic threat as well as the fate of the proof in the critical period.

2 Panentheism and the Exemplification Premise

Panentheism is the doctrine that the spatio-temporal universe inheres in or is a property of God but does not exhaust God's nature. The term was coined by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause in the early nineteenth century, but the doctrine is old and was associated with Spinoza in Kant's day (on Krause, see Göcke 2018). In his lectures, Kant describes two kinds of "pantheism":

> Spinozism is a particular sort of pantheism, for I can say either that everything (*alles*) is God —that would be Spinozism—or else that space (*das All*) is God, that would be pantheism proper (*eigentlicher*) [...]. Pantheism is thus (1) Pantheism of Inherence—that would be Spinozistic [or] (2) Pantheism of the aggregate of many substances in connection, thus very different from the first kind. (*Lect. Met. Dohna* 28/2.1:692.3–10)

> Pantheism is either [a doctrine] about inherence, and this is Spinozism, or else one about aggregation [...]. Spinoza says the world inheres in God as accidents, and thus worldly substances (*Weltsubstanzen*) are his effects (*Wirkungen*) but in itself there is only one substance [...]. In Spinozism God is the Ur-ground (*Urgrund*) of everything that is in the world. In [aggregative] pantheism, he is an aggregate of everything in the world. (*Lect. Met. K₂* 28/2.1:794.35– 795.8)

In these transcripts, "Spinozism" is described as a special kind of pantheism: it says that the world is "in" God in the manner of an "inhering" attribute. This is what Krause dubbed "panentheism." The other kind of pantheism is "proper" pantheism—the view that the *aggregate* of all things in space just *is* God.[19] In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant rejects the latter "aggregate" picture as a "crude sketch" (*Schattenriss*) of the way in which the *ens realissimum* grounds real possibility

---

[19] The lecture notes are a bit wobbly on this distinction: earlier in the same transcripts, Kant is quoted as associating Spinozism with the "aggregate" picture: "The concept of the *ens realissimum* represents God as an aggregate, as sum total [*Inbegriff*]—but we are thus easily led to Spinozism" (*Lect. Met. Dohna* 28/2.1:698.28–30).

(*CPR* A 579/B 607).[20] But it is clear that panentheism ("Spinozism") was also something Kant meant to avoid. Despite that, I think the proof threatens to deliver precisely that result, and in at least two distinct ways.[21]

2.1 The First Panentheistic Threat

The first panentheistic-Spinozistic threat, as we saw in Section 1 above, stems from the idea that spatial and temporal predicates are both really possible and irreducible to relations between things in space and time. In other words, *being extended in space* and *being extended in time* are fundamental gradable predicates (in fact "extension" is one the examples Kant explicitly gives of an unanalyzable predicate at *GP* 2:80.26). According to the Exemplification Premise in (9), this means that the material ground of real possibility must exemplify the maximal predicates on the two continua—namely, *being infinitely extended in space* and *being infinitely extended in time.*

Kant does not seem concerned about this threat in 1763, since in that period he was still inclined towards Leibnizean relationalism about space and time (and, accordingly, he takes back the surprising suggestion that extension is unanalysable a few pages later in *Ground of Proof*). As long as the *ens realissimum* exemplifies the maximal fundamental and non-gradable fundamental realities, the proof goes through. Derivative predicates, such as spatio-temporal relations, can be grounded in some other way.

By 1768, in his *Directions*, *Kant* decisively rejects the relationalist doctrine, partly on the grounds that it cannot make sense of incongruent counterparts (see *Directions* 2:383.14–20). So spatio-temporal features are no longer construed as reducible to the non-relational predicates of relata in space and time. But if the absolute containers of space and time are irreducibly real, then it becomes hard to see how they could be derived or constructed from anything non-spatio-temporal.[22] Moreover, as we have seen, because spatio-temporal predicates are lo-

---

20 For other passages in which Kant rejects the conception of God as the aggregate "sum total", see *Lect. Met. K$_2$* 28/2.1:780.14–16, *Lect. Met. Dohna* 28/2.1:692.35–693.3 as well as *Prominent Tone* 8:405.36. Thanks to Maya Krishnan for pointing me to some of these passages, and for helpful discussion of them.

21 This is worth emphasizing. Although some commentators have associated my view with that of Boehm (2014) who suggests that Kant may have self-consciously *endorsed* Spinozism, my claim was always just that his argument seems to lead to it *malgré lui.*

22 Colin Marshall points out that Newtonian space could be derived from some higher dimensional space, or something sufficiently similar to space. This is not something Kant would have contem-

cated on gradable continua, this would mean (in keeping with the Exemplification Premise in (9)) that God must ground them by exemplifying the *maximal* versions at the infinite end of each continuum. In other words, if Newtonian absolute space and time are really possible, then God must exemplify them. Space must be "God's body." That is the first panentheistic threat. Uncoincidentally perhaps, at precisely the time (see *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer,* 1766) that Kant was dropping relationalism about space and time, he also became deeply skeptical about speculative metaphysics.

Two years later, Kant adjusts his view of space and time again: although he retains the broadly Newtonian conception of space and time as irreducible containers, he now claims that they are *not* ultimately real, but for a different reason. In the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770, he argues that they are non-relational but transcendentally *ideal* "representations" produced by the mind's transaction with other noumenal entities.

> *Time is not something objective and real*, nor is it a substance, an accident, or a relation. (*Inaugural Dissertation* 2:400.21–2)

> *Space is not something objective and real*, nor is it a substance, an accident, or a relation; it is, rather, subjective and ideal; it issues from the nature of the mind in accordance with a stable law as a scheme, so to speak, for co-ordinating everything which is sensed externally. (*Inaugural Dissertation* 2:403.23–6)

There are many further changes over the eighteen-year period between the *Inaugural Dissertation* and the second *Critique,* but obviously transcendental idealism survives. By 1788 Kant had also come to recognize more clearly the theological benefits of his signature doctrine. For if we want to be non-relationalists about spacetime but *refuse* to be idealists, Kant says, then we have to admit that the *ens realissimum* itself contains space and time among its "determinations":

> If the ideality of time and space is not adopted, nothing remains but Spinozism, in which space and time are essential determinations of the original being itself, while the things dependent upon it (ourselves therefore included) are not substances but merely accidents inhering in it. (*CprR* 5:102.45–6)

In other words, transcendental realism plus non-relationalism about space leads to panentheism. This is something that Newton himself might have endorsed. In a famous passage from *De Gravitatione* (1660) he says that "space [...] is not absolute in

---

plated, but in any case his argument would then imply that God has to exemplify this higher dimensional space instead.

itself, but is as it were an emanative effect of God and an affection of every kind of being" (Newton 1660 in 2004, 21). Space is a divine emanation—something that in-heres but does not exhaust the divine being. Thus "God is everywhere" and

> [s]pace is eternal in duration and immutable in nature because it is the emanative effect of an eternal and immutable being. (Newton in 1660 in 2004, 25–6)[23]

There is much to say about this argument, but not much more I can say about it here. In Section 3 I will suggest that it works against recent alternative readings of how the *ens realissimum* is supposed to play the role of the material ground of real possibility. But for now I propose to grant the *reductio ad Spinozum* argument here, and also grant that adopting idealism about space and time evades it. There is still, I submit, another way in which the logic of the proof threatens to deliver a panentheistic result. This threat is not so easily evaded, even on an ideal-ist picture.

2.2 The Second Panentheistic Threat

Recall that the material ground of real possibility has two key functions: it grounds the *content* of the really possible predicates (i. e. it explains why *having an IQ of 120* is really possible) and it grounds the *compatibility and incompatibility* of various really possible predicates (i. e. it explains why *being Lampe's twin* is really possible and *being matter that thinks* is not). Recall, too, that the Grounding Premise in (4) says that the material ground of such facts about content, harmony, and repug-nance must be actual. Finally, recall that the Exemplification Premise in (9) says that this actual material ground must exemplify the fundamental maximal and non-gradable predicates, and that this is what allows it to serve as the ultimate ma-terial ground of all the derivative predicates too (by way of negation, limitation, and combination).

But now a further turn of the Spinozistic screw: harmonies and repugnancies between predicates do not always arise at the fundamental level. Rather, they sometimes arise *between* derivative predicates that are really possible per se. For example: *being a dolphin* and *being Lampe* are individually possible derivative predicates, but *being Lampe, a dolphin* is not really possible. Kripkeanly put: *being water* and *having the chemical composition XYZ* are individually really possible, but *being water with the chemical composition XYZ* clearly is not. Kantianly put: *being extended* and *being a mind* are individually really possible, but *being an ex-*

---

23 For discussion of Newton's views about God and space in *De Gravitatione*, see Jacquette (2014).

tended mind is not (*GP* 2:85.32). Schematically put: *being X* and *being R* may be really possible fundamental predicates, considered individually, but that does not guarantee that the derivative predicate *being X and R* is really possible.

The second panentheistic threat arises, then, because facts about what is really possible and impossible at derivative levels (including the spatio-temporal one) are not simply the "consequences" of fundamental predicates by way of simple operations like negation, combination, and limitation. A somewhat paradoxical way to put this is to say that a new kind of *fundamental* modal fact can arise at the level of the derivatives—facts about their real harmony and real repugnance. But according to the possibility proof, all fundamental modal facts about the predicates of real possibility (including, now, instances of the predicate-types *being really harmonious with* and *being really repugnant to*) require an explanation in reality. And, again, it is hard to see where that could be located other than in the "determinations" of the material ground of real possibility.

Thus, although Kant himself did not foresee and would not have embraced this conclusion, the logic of the proof seems to lead him back into the arms of Spinoza. The material ground must *exemplify* not just the fundamental and non-gradable predicates, but also *all* of the really possible predicates, including the derivative ones, in order to ground facts about *what is (in)compossible with what.* This has the benefit of showing why the ground of material possibility might need to be a *single* being (at step (11)), rather than a plurality—a point on which other interpretations struggle.[24] But it also leads to panentheism.

A still further turn of the screw: we have seen that all the derivative predicates must be exemplified by the material ground such that their distributions ground the new fundamental modal facts about which combinations of predicates are really compossible (and incompossible) with which. If the material ground is just *one* being (as in (11)), then that being will have to exemplify the predicates of possibility in some sort of furcated or siloed way. One furcation (the Spinozistic term, of course, is "attribute") would contain the really possible combinations of predicates of extension, another furcation would contain the really possible combinations of predicates of thought, and so on. Given that some of the repugnancies obtain between physical predicates, there might be even further furcations within the attributes.

I am not sure this picture is coherent in the end. But even if it is, the result looks decidedly "monstrous" from a traditional theological point of view. We have to abandon Kant's effort to refine the concept of the *ens realissimum* such

---

24 See Yong (2014), Stang (2016), and Abaci (2019) for detailed discussions of this "plurality" problem.

that it exemplifies only the maximal and non-gradable fundamental predicates and grounds the derivative predicates in some other way (by negation, limitation, combination, etc.). Instead, God must somehow exemplify all of the compossible arrangements of predicates, including the derivative spatio-temporal predicates. Again, I am not suggesting that Kant himself saw (much less acknowledged) this second panentheistic threat to his proof. He clearly assumed that his *ens realissimum* is just the classical monotheistic deity (*GP* 2:89.4). But I think the threat is clear and present all the same.

Having reconstructed the proof and considered two ways in which it threatens to lead to panentheism, I now want to consider a few key efforts in the recent literature to resist the second version of the threat on Kant's behalf. I will suggest that there are both textual and philosophical costs involved in accepting these alternative readings. In Section 4 I discuss the fate of the possibility proof in the critical period.

3 Alternative Accounts of How God Grounds Real Possibility

The past decade of discussion, and in particular the desire to avoid a panentheistic result, have given rise to various alternatives to the Exemplification Thesis on Kant's behalf. It is important to emphasize again that all of us agree that, *for Kant*, God is supposed to exemplify all and only the traditional perfections (infinite power, infinite knowledge, infinite goodness, and so on). This is what allows God to be the ultimate material ground of the real possibility of *some* of the finite real possibilities (finite powers, finite knowledge, finite goodness, and so on). But these other commentators claim that exemplifying a predicate is *not* the only way in which God can be the ultimate material ground of a real possibility. If they are right, then we do not need to ascribe the really possible but *derivative* predicate-combinations to the most real being as "determinations," and can thus avoid the second panentheistic threat.

Here is a list of what I take to be the main options in the literature (by "basic facts about real modality" I mean modal facts about predicate-exemplification that cannot be explained by contingent beings):

Creation: Some of the basic facts about real modality are ultimately grounded in God's non-intentional features, and some are ultimately grounded in acts of God's actual will.

Powers: Some of the basic facts about real modality are ultimately grounded in God's non-intentional features, and some are ultimately grounded in facts about what God can and cannot do.

Thinking: Some of the basic facts about real modality are ultimately grounded in God's non-intentional features, and some are ultimately grounded in the contents of God's thoughts.

Mysterianism: We naturally and properly represent the basic facts about real modality as ultimately grounded in God's non-intentional features, acts, powers, and thoughts. But the way that God ultimately grounds the basic facts about real modality is in fact none of these, and none that can be known to us.

Each of these involves rejecting the idea that was behind the Exemplification Premise in (9) above, namely:

Exemplification: All of the basic facts about real modality are ultimately grounded in God's non-intentional features.

Before going through these alternatives, it is worth making two general textual points. First, there is strong evidence that Kant thought that *ultimate* material grounding of possibility goes by way of divine exemplification. For he says, again, that fundamental predicates of possibility must be "given as a determination in the actual," of which the derivative predicates are mere "consequences" (*GP* 2:79.19). "Determination" (*Bestimmung*) is one of the terms that eighteenth-century German philosophers used for what we would call a "property": "[t]o determine is to posit a predicate while excluding its opposite" (*NE* 1:393.20–2). And "given" is the term that Kant uses throughout his career to render the Latin "*datum*"—as we saw earlier it refers to something that is available to be instantiated in actuality. So another translation of this passage (at *GP* 2:79.24–6) would be that the fundamental predicates of possibility must "exist as a property of the actual." That provides *Exemplification* with a clear textual basis.

Second, the second *Critique* passage about transcendental realism and Spinozism quoted above is hard to square with these alternative accounts of what it is to be an *ultimate* material ground of real possibility. Recall what Kant says there: if space and time are fundamental predicates, then they will have to be "essential determinations of the original being itself [...] accidents inhering in it" (*CprR* 5:102.46). If Kant was already committed—as far back as 1763—to the view that some fundamental predicates can be grounded in divine acts, powers, or thoughts, then that option would *surely* have occurred to him in 1788. But in fact Kant says

that either space and time are ideal (and thus derivative "consequences" of more fundamental properties) or else God has to *exemplify* them in order to ground their possibility and actuality. The passage is complicated, to be sure. But it only makes sense, I submit, if Kant assumes that all the basic facts about real modality are ultimately grounded by being *exemplified.*

Having considered these two textual challenges that face all of them, let us now consider the alternative readings one-by-one. Each would allow Kant to evade the second Spinozistic threat to his proof; however, each comes at a significant philosophical cost, and none is explanatorily satisfying in the way that *Exemplification* is.

3.1 Creation

Creation as stated above divides into two:

> *Creation 1:* Some of the basic facts about real modality are ultimately grounded in God's non-intentional features, and some are ultimately grounded in features of the *actual* things God has created.

> *Creation 2:* Some of the basic facts about real modality are ultimately grounded in God's non-intentional features, and some are ultimately grounded in facts about the *possibilities* God has created.

Creation 1 says that the actual entities God creates can serve as the material ground of some real possibilities. *Creation 1* is not quite an endorsement of necessitarianism, since it allows that some of the predicate-combinations that actually exist can recur in other possible worlds. Thus in creating Joe the Camel, God made it the case that *being a camel* and *being hirsute* is a really possible predicate-combination. That in turn grounds the real possibility of hairy camels in other worlds.

Creation 1 fails, though, if we make the fairly trivial assumption that some predicates and predicate-combinations that are *not* actual are still really possible. Hume's missing shade of blue is not exemplified in actuality, but it is (let us assume) a really possible predicate. Likewise the predicate-combination *being a ten foot tall human being* seems really possible, even if it is and never will be actual. Leibniz explicitly says that the eternal truths include "truths about non-existent possibles" (1863, vol. 3, 586); it is hard to imagine Kant disagreeing with him here.

Creation 2 goes beyond *Creation 1* in arguing that among the things God *creates* are the possibilities themselves. In order to be different from *Creation 1*, the view must be that God creates the real possibilities *as* possibilities at the first logical moment of creation, and then subsequently decides to actualize some of them. Descartes subscribes to something like this two-moments-of-creation story regarding all the eternal truths. But assuming the view is coherent, we still want to know: what is it that explains the fact that God has created *these* possibilities rather than *those?* Perhaps the answer is that God surveys all the feature-combinations that are *possibly possible* and then decides to create some of them as *possible.* But then our inquiry can be restated at the next level up, about why those predicates are possibly possible ... *ad regressum infinitum.*

If on the other hand we just stipulate that at some level God creates *these* possibilities and not *those,* then we end up with a Cartesian-voluntarist picture according to which necessary truths about real possibility are the brute result of an act of divine will. Such a picture will be unattractive to any Leibnizean rationalist, and in any case Kant openly repudiates it: "the [divine] will makes nothing possible, but only decrees [as actual] what is already presupposed as possible" (*GP* 2:100.24–6, see also *GP* 2:91.30, *Lect. Met. Herder* 28/1:134.23–39). This text alone makes it clear that neither of these two *Creation* myths can be what Kant had in mind.

3.2 Powers

Powers is the much more subtle, non-voluntarist picture that emerges from reflection on *Creation 2*; it was also a live option in Kant's context, having been explicitly endorsed by Crusius.[25] *Powers* says that some of the basic facts about modality are ultimately grounded in what God is and is not *able* to actualize. In Crusius's terms, what is possible must

> contain at least as much reality in itself that, for everything that contradicts neither itself nor other given truths, God at least is a sufficient cause if he were to make use of his omnipotence. (Crusius 1743, §56)

The idea here is not that there are some non-logical rules coming from outside the divine nature that constrain God, but rather that it is just a fact about God's essence that God has the power to create extended beings on the one hand, and minds on the other, and yet does not have the power to create extended minds.

---

25 *Powers* was defended as an interpretation by Nicholas Stang in (2010), although he has since given it up. A version of it is still defended by Michael Oberst (draft), however.

The example, however, already shows that *Powers* suffers from much the same deficiency as *Creation.* What makes it the case that a detective matching Arthur Conan Doyle's description of Sherlock Holmes is really possible, on this reading? The fact that God can create just such a clever British detective. But what makes it the case that an omnipotent being can create Holmes? It seems like any non-voluntarist answer will have to presuppose that it is because Holmes is really possible. But then we are moving in a very tight explanatory circle indeed. Put another way: omnipotence is traditionally analyzed *in terms of* real possibility —it is the power to actualize any really possible state of affairs. It seems problematically circular to then try to ground real possibility in what omnipotence can do (compare Adams 2000, 438).

3.3 Thinking

Thinking has the weighty imprimatur of Leibniz and Wolff. The ascription of *Thinking* to Kant has also been defended in the recent commentary literature on the *Ground of Proof* essay by a number of authors, including Watkins, Fisher, Yong, and Hoffer. I focus here on Hoffer's version, which is the most recent and most elaborate.

Hoffer (2016) argues that God is the *ultimate* ground of at least some basic facts about modality not by instantiating all the really possible predicates, but simply by thinking "essences," which Hoffer associates with "Platonic ideas." Moreover, this "divine cognition […] is at the same time the capacity to produce" objects that instantiate those essences (Hoffer 2016, 202). This formulation is puzzling, because it makes it sound like *Thinking* and *Powers* are just the same view. Elsewhere Hoffer (2016, 208n) clarifies that the ultimate ground of real possibility is God's "intellectual power, which is identical with being a subject of ideas" and that this is prior to God's "causal power that grounds actuality". So on *Thinking,* God's thought is logically prior to God's power.

But how does the fact that essences are the intentional objects of God's thought serve as the ultimate ground of the real possibility of the things that instantiate them? Hoffer writes:

> As an intuitive intellect, God does not merely represent independently given ideas, but generates their reality (though not as an act of will). Since in Platonic ontology the idea has the highest reality and all derivative instances have a lower grade of reality through limitations of it, God as the sum-total of all ideas is the most real being (*ens realissimum*). (Hoffer 2016, 202–3)

There are three main problems with this line of argument. First, it is unclear what would motivate Hoffer to say that God is the "sum-total of all [Platonic] ideas" or essences—the whole point of *Thinking* was to say that the ideas are the *intentional objects* of the divine mind, rather than identical to that mind itself.

Second, the view does not make sense of the second *Critique* passage. If Kant saw way back in 1763 that God can be the ultimate ground of the real possibility of certain basic modal facts just by thinking various essences, then he would presumably recognize that God could do the same for the transcendentally real containers of space and time (assuming that these, too, have "ideas" or essences). What Kant flatly says in that 1788 passage, however, is that if space and time are transcendentally real, then God would have to ground their real possibility by exemplifying them.

Third, *Thinking* still fails to answer the key question—namely, what makes it the case that God can think *this* rather than *that?* This is just a modal version of the Euthyphro dilemma: does God represent polka-dotted dogs, a detective who matches Doyle's description of Holmes, Lampe's non-actual twin, and the-cosmo-logical-constant-being-slightly-different-than-it-is *because* these features, beings, and states of affairs are antecedently really possible? If so, then we still need an explanation of the latter facts, one which presumably takes us beyond the intentional objects of the divine mind. If not, then we are in a relatively unattractive table-pounding position: God *can* think some predicate-combinations and *cannot* think others, because God *does* think certain predicate-combinations, and *does not* think certain others.

Grasping the second horn of this dilemma is what Samuel Newlands recommends to Leibniz:

> To put it cheekily, Leibniz could be more of a Humean about 'modal laws.' In virtue of what is *p-and-not-p* not possibly true? In virtue of the fact that God doesn't think *that p-and-not-p*. To some, that answer gets matters backward. But the promise of a reductive grounding account of modality *should* be attractive to an advocate of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) like Leibniz. And we might well wonder, is a buck-stopping, table-pounding "God just can't!" explanatorily better off than a buck-stopping, table-pounding "God just doesn't!"? Certainly the latter answer seems more in the spirit of Leibniz's general project of providing theistic grounds for modal truths: base what God (and creatures) can and cannot do on what God actually does and does not do. (Newlands 2013, 169)

Newlands is arguing here that Leibniz's version of *Thinking* (in this case with respect to formal truths) is preferable to *Powers.* The idea is that although thoughts contain their objects in a merely intentional way, they are a more appropriate "reductive ground" than mere powers, since the latter contain their objects in a merely intentional *and* a modal way. This seems right: it should be more attractive to a

rationalist to "bottom out" facts about real possibility in something non-modal—a thought rather than a power.

But here is where I think the pre-critical Kant had a clear advantage over Leibniz and Wolff. Unlike *Thinking* (and *Powers*), *Exemplification* allows the explanation to bottom out in something that is *not only* non-modal but *also* non-intentional. To say that Lampe's twin is really possible because God thinks all his predicates together, but that there is simply no explanation of *why* God can or does think them together ('God just does!'), is not very satisfying. By contrast, to say that Lampe's non-actual twin is really possible because all of his properties are *exemplified* in a necessary being is much more satisfying. It is in effect to say that Lampe's twin is possible because, given some basic combinatorial principles, Lampe-the-second is *always already there* in the attributes of God. If you are a rationalist looking for a place to buck-stop and table-pound, there is surely none so satisfying as the non-intentional, non-modal, essential features of a necessary being.

Interestingly, Hoffer (2016, 202) agrees that "*Exemplification* seems to be based on the implication that actuality entails possibility. Therefore this account really explains modality away by reducing modal facts to non-modal facts about properties of God". That's a good synopsis of the view. He then goes on to object, however:

> But since the properties exemplified in God are not of a different kind than instances of exemplified properties in general, *Exemplification* does not clearly express what Kant seeks in his discussions of teleology and causality, namely, the explanation of the lawfulness exhibited by particular instances. According to my reading [i. e. *Thinking*], modal facts are explained as a relation of instances to universal essences, the kind of entities posited to explain the possibility of things as the type of things they are and their possible relations to things of other types. (Hoffer 2016, 203)

This is a complicated passage. However, Hoffer seems to be admitting that *Thinking* simply "posits" the "universal essences" as the object of divine thought in order to "explain the possibility of things" and their lawful relations to "things of other types." Again, however, that leaves us with the key question: *why* does or can God think *these* essences rather than *those?* In the end, it is hard to see how Hoffer ends up doing more than simply pounding Newlands' table ever harder.

3.4 Mysterianism

In his important book on Kant's metaphysics of modality (2016), Nicholas Stang abandons his earlier commitment to *Powers* (Stang 2010). Instead of embracing *Exemplification*, however, the later Stang punts to *Mysterianism* instead. His stated

reason for the change is textual rather than philosophical: he cites two "proof texts" in *Ground of Proof* where Kant supposedly rejects *all* competing accounts in favor of a view according to which "the way in which possibilities are grounded in God is literally incomprehensible to us" (Stang 2016, 118).

Stang's recantation is qualified, however: he combines this rejection of *Powers* with the claim that early Stang was correct to say that, for Kant, we must *think* of real possibility as grounded in God's powers, because only that will make the possibility proof valid (Stang 2016, 145–6). Thus later Stang finds in *Ground of Proof* a harbinger of the *Critique*'s distinction between our best conception of a metaphysical situation (which may still be dialectical) and the truth about the real beings and relations involved.

Mysterianism is an ingenious position. By Stang's own admission, the argument for it is almost entirely textual. But the case for his two proof-texts has been powerfully challenged in the secondary literature (see Yong 2017 and Abaci 2019), and I will not consider it here.

There are also some philosophical considerations, however, that work against *Mysterianism.* First, it is hard to see why the *pre*-critical Kant, an inveterate speculative metaphysician who says he is still willing to "subscribe to" the Principle of Sufficient Reason, would suddenly punt to mystery like this. Moreover, if he is willing to go mysterian here, then it seems like he might have expressed some mysterian tendencies regarding other assumptions we make about the nature of grounding, the "elements" of real modality, and so on.[26]

Second, it is even harder to see why the pre-critical Kant would think it is *legitimate* for us to conceive of the grounding relation *inaccurately* in terms of *Powers*, just in order to make his proof go through. Stang is openly projecting Kant's *critical* doctrines about noumenal ignorance and regulative "as-if" speculation back into the pre-critical period here. But in general the 1763 text reveals no such modesty about our powers of speculation.[27]

If what I have said in this section is correct, *Exemplification* is left standing as the most satisfying account of *ultimate* ground of the material facts of real possibility—both the facts about content and the facts about compossibilty and repugnance. In response to the question "Why is *this* possible rather than *that?*" the defender of *Exemplification* can say: "Because *this* and not *that* is exemplified in the non-intentional predicates of a necessary being." Even if there were no actual Dalmatians, dolphins, or Prussian servants, God's nature would explain why a polka-

---

26 Thanks to Colin Marshall for this second point.

27 For more discussion of late Stang's (2016), see Chignell (2017) (on which this section of the chapter draws).

dotted dog is possible and a Lampe-dolphin is not. But this means, of course, that the second panentheistic threat remains.

4 The Fate of the Proof in the Critical Period

The possibility proof is of philosophical interest in its own right, but it is also important because of what happens to it in the critical period. This too is an item of disagreement among commentators. Here are a few of the data points on which most people agree:

(1) The possibility proof does not reappear in a clearly-stated way in the first *Critique.* But there are indications that Kant retained some kind of actualist commitment regarding the metaphysics of modality. In the Pölitz lectures of the 1780s, for instance, he is reported to have said that

> we have no conception of real possibility except through existence, and in the case of every possibility which we think *realiter* we always presuppose some existence; if not the actuality of the thing itself, then at least an actuality in general which contains the data for everything possible. (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1036.13–18)

There is also the now-familiar comment in the second *Critique* according to which God would have exemplify spatio-temporal predicates unless we accept that the latter are transcendentally ideal.[28]

(2) In the "Ideal of Pure Reason" chapter in the first *Critique*, Kant develops what looks like a psychological/epistemological analogue of the proof. . He argues that our ability to *conceive* of finite possibilities presupposes the ability to *conceive* of a "storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken." That "storehouse" is then united into the idea of a "thing in itself which is thoroughly determined"—one that has the positive member of every predicate-complement pair, and the maximal version of the positive predicates that are gradable. This, says Kant, is just the idea of an *ens realissimum* and it is also the "single genuine ideal of which human reason is capable" (*CPR* A 575–6/B 603–4).

(3) Despite the inevitability of this ideal conception, the critical Kant thinks that we cannot prove that there is a being that corresponds to it. He has by

---

28 Krishnan is working out a picture according to which, for the critical Kant, space and time and thus many spatio-temporal features do not require grounding in the *ens realissimum*—it grounds noumenal possibilities. This is in the spirit of the second *Critique* passage, and would allow Kant to evade the second panentheistic threat.

now rejected the idea that the Principle of Sufficient Reason or any other rationalist principle can give us *knowledge* of the supersensible, and thinks that there are various other "illusions" and "subreptions" involved in moving from the idea of a "storehouse of material" for thought to the postulation of a corresponding being (*CPR* A 583/B 611). This is where anti-rationalist views like *Mysterianism* really do pop up: the way we inevitably and quite reasonably speculate about these metaphysical issues is no longer a good guide to how things really are. In Kant's words:

> The concept of a highest being is a very useful idea in many respects, but just because it is merely an idea, and it is entirely incapable itself of extending our cognition in regard to what exists. (*CPR* A 602/B 630)

All of this is fairly uncontentious. But there are also items of major disagreement. Some commentators (present author included) are survivalists (i.e. people who think that the proof still survives in the background of the discussion in the "Ideal" chapter). Others argue that the critical sundering of the order of ideas from the order of things means that the "Ideal" chapter does not invoke the possibility proof at all. Oberst (2020) and Krishnan (draft) plump for this sort of anti-survivalism about the possibility proof (Krishnan's term). That proof was about metaphysical grounding and limitation relations between God and really possible predicates, whereas in the *Critique* Kant merely discusses relations between our *concept* of God and our *concepts* of finite possibilities. So the "Ideal" is not even a representation—at the level of ideas—of the beings and metaphysical-limitation relations involved in the 1763 proof. In a memorable phrase, "a limitation of a representation is not a representation of a limitation."[29]

Although knowledge of God's existence is denied in the Ideal, some survivalist commentators (again, present company included) argue that Kant remained open to "accepting" (*annehmen*) the existence of the *ens realissimum* as an item of doctrinal[30] Belief (*Glaube*) on the basis of the *Ground of Proof* reasoning (see Chignell 2009). In the same lectures from the 1780's he is reported to have said that of all the theistic proofs, the "one that affords of the most satisfaction is [my old] argument that if we remove an original being, we at the same time remove the substratum of the possibility of all things" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1034.11–13). Moreover,

> this proof can in no way be refuted, because it has its basis in the nature of human reason. For my reason makes it absolutely necessary for me to accept (*anzunehmen*) a being which is the

---

29 See Krishnan, draft.
30 I capitalize "Belief" here to make it clear that it is the translation of the technical Kantian term *Glaube.*

> ground of everything possible, because otherwise I would be unable to realize (*erkennen*) what in general the possibility of something consists in. (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1034.16–20)

Rational "acceptance" or "Belief" (*Vernunftglaube*) is the kind of assent that the critical Kant thinks of as warranted but not susceptible of "proof" or capable of being knowledge.

It is controversial, however, precisely why an "irrefutable" line of reasoning fails to count as a proof. My own suggestion is that the critical Kant has placed a modal condition on cognition and knowledge—one according to which we only know a proposition if we are in a position to establish whether the objects it refers to are really possible or impossible.[31] In the passage following the one just quoted from the *Critique,* Kant says, of the concept of God:

> The analytic mark of possibility, which consists in the fact that mere positings (realities) do not generate a contradiction, of course, cannot be denied of this concept; since, however, the connection of all real properties in a thing is a synthesis about whose possibility we cannot judge *a priori* [...] the famous Leibniz was far from having achieved what he flattered himself he had done, namely gaining insight *a priori* into the [real] possibility of such a sublime ideal being. (*CPR* A 602/B 630; compare *Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1025.33–1026.2)

As a result, the proof is no longer a source of demonstrative knowledge but rather of warranted doctrinal Belief: "But even this proof is not apodictically certain; for it cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being, but establishes only the subjective necessity of accepting such a being" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1034.13–16).

Abaci (2019) agrees that the proof is still present in Kant's thought, but does not think it survives in the mode of Belief. Rather, he argues that it is "demoted" by way of a change in how Kant conceived of the "actualist principle" (what I was calling the "Grounding Premise" in (4)). According to Abaci, the principle

> no longer expresses an ontological condition of the absolute real possibility of things in general but only an epistemological condition of our cognition of (relative) real possibilities of empirical objects. (Abaci 2019, 228)

By contrast, anti-survivalists prefer to say that that the proof does not lurk behind the curtain at all in the critical writings, and argue that invocations of it in lecture notes are either unreliable or merely remarks on the views of others (Oberst 2020). Alternatively, they might say that, for Kant, reason naturally engages in *Ground of Proof*-style reasoning that has been shown in the "Dialectic" to be fatally flawed—

---

31 For more on this condition, see Chignell (2021).

and so in that sense does not survive (Krishnan, draft).[32] Thus the debate about the fate of the proof in the critical period continues …

5 Conclusion

The publication of Kant's possibility proof in 1763 is the high-water mark of his speculative ambitions. The young Kant takes Leibnizian-Wolffian actualism about the grounding of possibility, adds what he regards as an innovative distinction between logical and real modality, and generates the result that the classical God necessarily exists.

I have argued here that the logic of the proof ultimately pushes us towards the more radical panentheistic conclusion that the *ens realissimum* is not the classical God, but rather a being that grounds *all* the really possible predicates and predicate-combinations by exemplifying them. Kant became aware of the version of this threat that is focused on space-time, I think, and later touted his brand of idealism as the only way to neutralize it.

He did not, however, see the second version of the threat—the one that invokes the need to ground new modal facts that arise from the combination of the fundamental predicates. We saw that recent commentators offer ingenious explanations of how the critical Kant might be able to evade this version of the second threat, but I argued that they run into a number of textual and philosophical problems.

Finally, we have seen that there are ongoing debates about whether and to what extent the possibility proof survives in the arguments of the "Transcendental Dialectic".

References

Abaci, Uygar, "Kant's Only Possible Argument and Chignell's Real Harmony," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 1–25.

Abaci, Uygar, *Kant's Revolutionary Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Adams, Robert Merrihew, "God, Possibility, and Kant," *Faith and Philosophy* 17.4 (2000), 425–40.

Boehm, Omri, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91.2 (2009), 157–92.

---

32 There are obviously limits to how useful the "survivalist" vs. "anti-survivalist" contrast is going to be here, since there are many such positions in between.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant, Real Possibility, and the Threat of Spinoza," *Mind* 121.483 (2012), 635–75.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant and the 'Monstrous' Ground of Possibility: A Reply to Abaci and Yong," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 53–69.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant's Modal Metaphysics, by Nicholas Stang," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 16 (2016), https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/kants-modal-metaphysics/, last access September 1, 2023.

Chignell, Andrew, "Knowledge, Anxiety, Hope: How Kant's First and Third Questions Relate," in *The Court of Reason: Proceedings of the 13th International Kant Congress*, ed. by Beatrix Himmelmann and Camilla Serck-Hanssen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 127–50.

Crusius, Christian August, *Dissertatio de Usu et Limitibus Principii Rationis Determinantis Vulgo Sufficientis* (Leipzig: Officina Langenhemiana, 1743).

Fisher, Mark/ Watkins, Eric, "Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility: From *The Only Possible Argument* to the *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Review of Metaphysics* 52.2 (1998), 369–95.

Göcke, Benedikt Paul, *The Panentheism of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832): From Transcendental Philosophy to Metaphysics* (Boston: Peter Lang, 2018).

Heine, Heinrich (1835), "Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland," in *Sämtliche Werke in vier Bänden*, ed. by Otto Lachman, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Reclam, 1921), vol. 3, 480–99.

Hoffer, Noam, "The Relation Between God and the World in the Pre-Critical Kant: Was Kant a Spinozist?," *Kantian Review* 21.2 (2016), 185–210.

Hoffer, Noam, "The Dialectical Illusion in Kant's *Only Possible Argument for the Existence of God*," *Kantian Review* 25.3 (2020), 339–63.

Jacquette, Dale, "Newton's Metaphysics of Space as God's Emanative Effect," *Physics in Perspective* 16.3 (2014), 344–70.

Krishnan, Maya, "Was Kant a Spinozist? The Status of the Exemplification Account of the *Ens Realissimum* in Kant's Critical Theology," (unpublished).

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, *Mathematische Schriften*, ed. by Carl Immanuel Gerhardt (Berlin: A. Asher, 1863).

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. by Carl Immanuel Gerhardt, 7 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–90).

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

Newlands, Samuel, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility," *The Philosophical Review* 122.2 (2013), 155–87.

Newton, Isaac (1660), "De Gravitatione," in *Newton. Philosophical Writings,* ed. by Andrew Janiak, trans. by Arnie Hall and Marie Boas Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Oberst, Michael, "The Possibility Proof Is Not What Remains From Kant's *Beweisgrund*," *Kantian Review* 25.2 (2020), 219–42.

Oberst, Michael, "God, Powers, and Possibility in Kant's *Beweisgrund*," (unpublished).

Stang, Nicholas F., "Kant's Possibility Proof," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.3 (2010), 275–99.

Stang, Nicholas F., *Kant's Modal Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Wolff, Christian (1720), *Vernünftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, ed. by Charles Corr (Hildesheim: Olms, 1983, 7th edition), vol. 3.

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

Wood, Allen W., *Kant and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Yong, Peter, "God, Totality and Possibility in Kant's Only Possible Argument," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 27–51.

Paul Guyer
Proof and Belief: The *Critique of Pure Reason* on the Existence of God

1 Introduction

In the preface to his final book, the *Morning Lessons* of 1785, Moses Mendelssohn referred to the "all-crushing" (*alles zermalmenden*) Kant.[1] What Mendelssohn had in mind was Kant's criticism of the ontological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which Mendelssohn then defended in the *Morning Lessons.* Kant responded directly to the *Morning Lessons* in his essay "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thought?," published in 1786, a few months after Mendelssohn's death, but returned to the charge in the "Preface" to the second edition of the *Critique*, published in 1787, when he summed up his work by stating that he "had to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*" because he could not "even *assume God, freedom and immortality* for the sake of the necessary practical use of [his] reason unless [he] simultaneously *deprive*[d] speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights," for speculative or theoretical reason's limitation "only to objects of possible experience" would "declare all *practical extension* of pure reason to be impossible" (*CPR* B xxix–xxx). To stick with Mendelssohn's metaphor, Kant's response is that in order to avoid the possibility of rational belief in the existence of God being crushed by the collapse of theoretical metaphysics, such belief must, and can, be grounded upon the imperatives of practical reason. That is, Kant took himself to have shown that there can be no sound theoretical proof of the existence of God, but that this by no means amounts to "crushing" all possibility of such belief, because neither can there be any theoretical *disproof* of the existence of God, and

---

1 See Mendelssohn (1929–, vol. 3.2, 3). Bruce Rosenstock so translates Mendelssohn's word in *Moses Mendelssohn: Last Works* (Mendelssohn 2012, 3). Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck translate Mendelssohn's words as "all-quashing" in Moses Mendelssohn, *Morning Hours: Lectures on God's Existence* (Mendelssohn 2011, xix). "Quashing" is not necessarily physical, since you can quash a subpoena, but "crushing" is physical, as when you crush rock into gravel or an old car into scrap, so I think the latter better captures the physicality of Mendelssohn's *zermalmend.*

Allen Wood (1978, 15–17) and Peter Byrne (2007, 2–3) both refer to Heinrich Heine's description of Kant as *Weltzermalmender* in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (Heine 2007, 79). But Heine discusses Mendelssohn several pages before he uses this term, and indeed was distantly related to David Friedländer, a disciple of both Kant and Mendelssohn (Sammons 1979, 90), so it is likely that Heine himself was alluding to Mendelssohn's term *allzermalmende.*

moreover there are sufficient *practical* grounds for belief in the existence of God, rooted in the conditions of the undoubted and indubitable possibility of morality.

More fully, the existence of God cannot be proven on theoretical grounds, because the concept of God is the concept of something entirely unconditioned; all theoretical knowledge requires evidence from intuition, whether pure or empirical, that the concept concerned is instantiated; but evidence from intuition is always conditioned; so no intuition can prove the existence of God. But precisely because it is the concept of something unconditioned, the concept of God is the concept of something that necessarily lies beyond the limits of intuition, thus there is also no intuition that could disprove the existence of God. Further, in Kant's view, reason, in both its theoretical and its practical application, *requires* the formation of the *concept* of God, and, while this concept can be of only regulative use in theoretical contexts, in the case of the practical use of reason, Kant argues, our indubitable conviction of the possibility of our acting morally requires belief in the existence of God.[2] Such belief is rational, because it moves from the necessary object of our will to the necessary conditions of its possibility, even though it does not amount to theoretical cognition.

Two decades before he published the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the *Only Possible Ground of Proof in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* of 1763 (see Chapter 2), Kant had argued that there are fatal flaws in what he recognized as the three possible theoretical arguments for the existence of God: in his novel terminology, the ontological argument of Anselm and Descartes, that is, the argument from the concept of God to the necessary existence of God; the cosmological argument of Leibniz and Wolff, the argument from the existence of something contingent, for example, one's own existence, to the existence of something necessary, namely God; and the physico-theological argument, or argument from design, beloved by popular divines.[3] He had then replaced these arguments with his own argument from the existence of any mere possibility to the necessary existence of a ground of all possibility, namely God—the "only possible ground." In the third section of the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, entitled "The Ideal of Pure Reason," Kant first skewers a version of his own previous argument

---

2 Byrne (2007, e.g. 1–2), stresses that Kant argues for the necessity of the *concept* of God even while rejecting theoretical *proof* of the existence of God.

3 Kant is not concerned with variations between the versions of the ontological argument in Anselm and Descartes, although he does refer to both, nor with differences between the versions of the cosmological argument in Leibniz and Wolff, or for that matter in Aquinas, to whom he does not refer. Nor does he explicitly associate the argument from design with any particular author. For discussions of the differences among versions of the ontological argument, see Henrich (1960), Stang (2015, 583–94), and Abaci (2019, esp. 17–33).

that we have theoretical knowledge of the necessary ground of all possibility, then recapitulates his long-standing criticism of the three traditional arguments.[4] In the "Appendix" that follows, Kant starts his two-pronged argument that reason's necessary concept of God is nevertheless of regulative use in the theoretical application of reason, the second prong coming in the "Canon of Pure Reason" in the "Doctrine of Method" with the an initial exposition of his view that belief in the actual existence of God is indispensable for the practical use of reason, a view that he continues to develop in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment.* But before Kant even reaches the "Ideal of Pure Reason," he has already established that what are essentially two versions of the cosmological argument for the existence of God are neither provable nor disprovable in the "Third" and "Fourth" antinomies in "The Antinomy of Pure Reason," the section of the "Transcendental Dialectic" that precedes the "Ideal." This duplication of effort may be due to the fact that during the development of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, before dividing his critique of traditional speculative metaphysics into the three parts of the "Paralogism," "Antinomy," and "Ideal of Pure Reason," Kant had originally envisioned encompassing it all a single-sectioned "Transcendental Dialectic" in antinomial form.[5] Kant's critique of the cosmological argument in the "Antinomy" may also be better than his critique of it in the "Ideal."

The following will therefore be divided into five parts: first, Kant's treatment of the cosmological argument in the "Antinomy"; second, the self-critique of his earlier argument from any possibility to the reality of God in the first part of the "Ideal"; third, his critique of the three standard arguments for the existence of God in the second part of the "Ideal"; fourth, his defense of the regulative theoretical use of the idea of God in the "Appendix" to the "Ideal"; and finally his first stab at an argument for the necessity of the belief in God on practical grounds in the "Canon of Pure Reason."

---

4 The argument of Wood (1978) is that Kant's argument from possibility in the first part of the "Ideal" is more convincing as an argument for the necessity of the idea of God than are his criticisms of the three traditional arguments in the second part of the "Ideal." Stang (2010) reconstructs and criticizes Kant's 1763 version of the possibility proof.
5 See Reflexionen 4756–60 (*Notes and Fragments* 17:699–713), all dated by Erich Adickes to the years 1775–77, translated in Kant (2005, 181–90). For discussion, see Guyer (1989).

2 Arguments about the Existence of God in the "Antinomy of Pure Reason"

The entire argument of the "Transcendental Dialectic" is based on the premise that it is "the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) [...] to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed," but that it is the mistake of speculative metaphysics to transform this "logical" principle into a "real" one by assuming that "when the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection)."[6] The second, real principle of reason is "obviously *synthetic*" (*CPR* A 307–8/B 364). But a synthetic judgment can be justified and thus known only by appeal to some intuition, whether pure or empirical, and since no intuition is unconditioned, for our intuition is always spatial and/ or temporal and any space or time can always be intuited as surrounded, preceded, or followed by yet more, thus the series of intuitions in space and time is never completed, thus always conditioned, yet nothing can be given in intuition outside of the spatial and/ or temporal series, thus nothing unconditioned can ever be given in or to intuition and no judgment about the unconditioned can ever be confirmed by intuition. But by the same token, no claim about the nature or the existence of anything unconditioned can ever be disconfirmed by intuition as long as that unconditioned is not conceived of spatio-temporally. Thus as long as the concept of God is purified of any spatio-temporal predicates (as it was by most modern philosophers, with the notable exceptions of Isaac Newton and Christian August Crusius),[7] the idea of God can be coherently formulated and there can even be rational belief in the existence of God on non-theoretical, namely practical grounds.

This argument about God is embedded in Kant's presentation of four "cosmological" antinomies, or antinomies concerning attempts to represent the world (that is, the whole universe, not just our planet) as a completed, unconditioned series. The first two antinomies concern the "absolute completeness" of the "composition" and "division" of a "given whole of all appearances" (*CPR* A 415/B 443), thus ask whether the world as a series of spatio-temporal objects and events can ever reach an absolutely maximal or minimal extent. Kant's answer is that since one can always represent any space or time, no matter how great or small, as further

---

6 For an extended interpretation of the "Transcendental Dialectic" along these lines, see Greer (2001).

7 See Insole (2011).

extended or divided, our representations of space and time and thus of everything in them are always only indefinitely extendable or divisible, never definitively finite or infinite in extent or division. Reason's idea of the unconditioned as absolute completeness simply cannot be applied to space and time or to anything in them—"appearances." The second two antinomies, however, concern the questions of the "*absolute completeness* of the *arising* of an appearance in general" and "of the *dependence* of the *existence* of the alterable in experience" (*CPR* A 415/B 443), and these can be construed as questions about the ground of the world *outside* of the series of spatio-temporal appearances, namely whether that ground could be some sort of cause of the entire cosmos that is itself a first cause, not the effect of any other cause, but not part of the cosmos, and whether that extra-cosmic cause could also be a necessary being, a necessary ground of all the contingent objects and events that make up the cosmos—in other words, whether there could be a God who is a necessary being and first cause of the entire series of appearances. Kant's answer is that since such a God is conceived of as existing outside of the spatio-temporal cosmos, the inevitably conditioned character of any representation of that cosmos does not prevent us from coherently *conceiving* of such an unconditioned being while it at the same time precludes the possibility of any theoretical *proof* of the existence of such a being.

In more detail, Kant presents the third and fourth antinomies of pure reason thus.[8] The third antinomy pits the thesis that "[c]ausality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all appearances of the world can be derived", "[i]t is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom to explain them" (*CPR* A 444/B 472) against the antithesis "[t]here is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with the laws of nature" (*CPR* A 445/B 472). The fourth antinomy pits the thesis "[t]o the world there belongs something that, either as a part of it or as its cause, is an absolutely necessary being" (*CPR* A 452/B 480) against the antithesis that "[t]here is no absolutely necessary being existing anywhere, either in the world or outside the world as its cause" (*CPR* A 453/B 481). Since Kant always assumes that if there is any necessary being, there can only be one necessary being, and that such a necessary being would be God, the fourth antinomy clearly concerns God; and the resolution of the antinomy is that although the antithesis is correct that no necessary being can be conceived *within* the world, since that is comprised entirely of contingent objects and events, any of which can be considered necessary relative to some others, but none of which can be considered absolutely or unconditionally necessary, we can at

---

8 For discussions of the "Antinomies", see, in addition to Greer (2001), Al-Azm (1972) and Bennett (1974).

least coherently conceive of an absolutely necessary being *outside* of the series of its contingents, so the thesis might be right to that extent—although precisely because this necessary being is conceived of as existing outside the series, nothing in our experience, which is always of the series, could prove its existence. The third antinomy is more complicated, since Kant does not intend to confine the domain of first causes as absolutely unconditioned, spontaneously acting beings to God; he is intent on establishing that we can coherently conceive of *our own* absolute, unconditioned freedom as well. But he also wants to establish that we can coherently conceive of God as a freely acting cause, and indeed to use God's as a model for our own freedom; so the third antinomy clearly does concern God. And Kant resolves it in the same way as he resolves the fourth: of course we cannot conceive of freedom, whether divine or human, within the series of spatio-temporal events, for that is entirely governed by causal laws, but we can at least coherently conceive of freedom or spontaneity outside of that series, and further, once room has been made for God's extramundane act of spontaneous creation, there is room for human freedom as spontaneity at the level of noumenal reality even if not within the series of appearances (although how to reconcile our own freedom with that of an omnipotent God is a traditional theological conundrum).[9] Once "the faculty of beginning a series in time entirely on its own is [...] proved (though no insight into it is achieved), now we are permitted also to allow that in the course of the world different series may begin on their own [...] and to ascribe to the substances in those series," namely ourselves, "the faculty of acting from freedom" (*CPR* A 448–50/B 476–8).

In his extensive commentary on the antinomies, Kant makes clear the fundamental difference in the resolutions of the first two and the second two. In the case of the first two, where both theses and antitheses concern the spatio-temporal cosmos, Kant states that

> I cannot say that the world is *infinite* in past time or in space [...] nor will I say that it is *finite* [...]. Accordingly, I will be able to say nothing about the whole object of experience (the world of sense), but only something about the rule in accord with which experience [...] is to be [...] continued. (CPR A 520/B 548)

That is, both theses and antitheses are false, because the series of spatio-temporal appearances is always but only indefinitely extendable in either direction, expansion or division. The third and fourth antinomies, however, since their antitheses concern the series of appearances but their theses can concern the extramundane

---

9 For discussion of Kant's occasional attempts to resolve this issue by means of the concept of "concurrence," see Insole (2013, esp. chapter 9, 192–223).

ground of that series (or the grounds of series within the latter, namely the conse- quences of our moral choices), "can be *mediated* to the satisfaction of both parties" as "a synthesis of *things not homogeneous*, which must be at least admitted" as pos- sible (*CPR* A 530/B 558). Kant's lengthy application of this position to the case of human freedom (*CPR* A 532–58/B 560–86) is beyond the concern of this chapter. His discussion of the resolution of the fourth antinomy, concerning "the highest condition of everything alterable, namely [...] the *necessary being*" (*CPR* A 559/B 587), is briefer, and is focused on the single point that the existence of such an ex- tramundane, necessary ground of the entire world of appearances is conceivable, but neither provable nor disprovable within the confines of theoretical cognition, thus within speculative metaphysics:

> [H]ere it is not all the intent to prove the unconditionally necessary existence of any being [...]; rather, just as we limit reason so that it does not abandon the thread of the empirical conditions, and stray into *transcendent* grounds of explanation which do not admit of any ex- hibition *in concreto*, so on the other side we limit the law of the merely empirical use of the understanding, so that it does not decide the possibility of things in general, *nor* declare the intelligible, even though it is not to be used by us in explaining appearances, *to be impossible.* (*CPR* A 562/B 590)

The theoretical use of reason can demonstrate neither the actuality nor the impos- sibility of God.

Even as Kant stresses the unprovability of a necessary external ground for the cosmic series, he also stresses the coherence of the concept of such a being. "But to think of an intelligible ground for appearances, i. e., for the world of sense, and of appearances freed from the contingency of the world of sense, is opposed neither to the unlimited empirical regress in the series of appearances nor to their thor- oughgoing contingency" (*CPR* A 563–4/B 591–2). But, Kant adds, since we can gain no information about such a being from experience, we would "have to derive our acquaintance with [it] from what is necessary in itself, from pure concepts of things in general"; we would have "to begin [...] the investigation of the absolutely necessary being [...] from the concepts of all things insofar as they are merely in- telligible" (*CPR* A 567/B 595). However, that is precisely what the "Ideal of Pure Rea- son" will show to lead to neither proof nor disproof of the existence of such a being.

3 "The Ideal of Pure Reason" I: Kant's Withdrawal of the Argument from Possibility to Necessity

By an "idea" Kant means a representation that contains "a certain completeness that no possible empirical cognition ever achieves," and by an "ideal" he understands "the idea not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo*, i. e., as an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone" (*CPR* A 567–8/B 595–6). The idea of God can be referred to as the ideal of pure reason because the idea of either unconditionally necessary or unconditionally perfect being is sufficient to determine that there can be only one such being. The question as Kant frames it is then whether the concept of such an ideal is sufficient to prove its objective reality, that is, its existence.

In the *Ground of Proof* essay Kant had argued that *any* possibility proves the existence of a unique necessary and perfect being, because even a mere logical possibility implies that *something* be given which is not contradicted; he then moved, I would say fallaciously, from a proposition like "Necessarily any possibility implies some actuality" ("$\Box((\exists x)(\text{Possible}x) \supset (\exists x)(\text{Actual}x))$") to a conclusion more like "Any possibility implies some necessary being" ("$(\forall x)(\text{Possible}x) \supset (\exists x)(\text{Necessary}x)$"), and of course there can be only one necessary being, for if there were more than one than each would be in some way conditioned by another and therefore not necessary or perfect on its own after all. Kant does not directly withdraw that argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason.* Instead, he constructs and then undermines an argument that is inspired to but not identical to one that Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten had offered in his *Metaphysica* (1739) and that Moses Mendelssohn had taken up in his prize "Essay on Evidence" in 1762.[10] This is an argument premised on the assumption that the complete determination of a concept implies the existence of its object, and that the concept of God as the most perfect being is completely determined—it leaves out no possible predicate of God—and the only concept that is so determined, so that it but it alone implies the existence of its object; thus the most perfect being also necessarily exists. Mendelssohn's proof in particular is that since the concept of God is the concept of the most perfect being, and necessary existence is a greater perfection than contingent being, the concept of God thus includes necessary existence, that is, God necessarily exists.[11] Kant's argument is rather the more purely Leibnizian argument that the

---

10 See Mendelssohn (1997, 251–306, at 282–3).

11 See Baumgarten (2013, §§803–11, 281–2), and Mendelssohn (1997, 281–2).

concept of *every* thing is completely determined in relation to the "whole of possibility":

> Every *thing*, however, as to its possibility, further stands under the principle of *thoroughgoing determination*; according to which, among *all possible* predicates of *things*, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it. This does not rest merely on the principle of contradiction, for besides considering every thing in relation to two contradictorily conflicting predicates, it considers every thing further in relation to *the whole of possibility*, as the sum total of all predicates of things in general; and by presupposing that as a condition *a priori*, it represents every thing as deriving its own possibility from the share it has in that whole of possibility. (*CPR* A 571–2/B 599–600)

This entails that the complete determination of the concept of an individual does *not* imply existence, since the Leibnizian complete concepts of individuals can still be concepts of merely possible individuals.[12] But Kant's argument takes a second step, namely it then supposes that there must be a real *ground* of this whole of possibility, which can be nothing other than something that contains that ground in the form of its own possession of all possible perfections to the highest degree, of which all the properties of lesser objects are then more limited degrees. "Thus it is a transcendental *ideal* which is the ground of the thoroughgoing determination that is necessarily encountered in everything existing, and which constitutes the supreme and complete material condition of its possibility, to which all thinking of objects in general, must, as regards the content of that thinking, be traced back" (*CPR* A 576/B 604). Notice the "necessarily" in this sentence: it is supposed to follow from the complete determination of the concept of any thing that the ideal of the sum-total of all possibility not only actually but also necessarily exists; this is meant to follow even from the mere possibility of any completely determined particular thing, something that Kant thinks could hardly be denied.

Having constructed this argument, however, Kant then curtly dismisses it with the statement that "all of this does not signify the relation of an actual object to other things, but only that of an *idea* to *concepts*, and as to the existence of a being of such preeminent excellence it leaves us in complete ignorance" (*CPR* A 579/B 607). He stresses that our idea of the sum total of all possibilities is actually limited because we are limited to "empirical reality" and have no determinate concepts of things beyond that limit, thus no concepts of the perfections of God that might be the ground of the concepts of those things. But Kant could also argue that

---

12 Stang (2015, 597) accepts Kant's rejection of the ontological argument, but on the ground of "actualism," that is, the view that *every* concept of an object includes the concept of its existence, so that this is not exclusive to the concept of God. Abaci (2019, 243) correctly argues that Kant cannot be committed to actualism.

our concepts of empirical things are always limited to what we have thus far experienced of an always indefinitely extendable empirical reality, thus that the complete determination of any empirical concept is always a mere idea, and we are never given the sum–total of all even merely empirical possibilities, let alone the sum-total of all possibilities in general. That remains a mere idea, *a fortiori* the concept of a complete ground of all possibilities also remains a mere idea. The premise for the inference to the necessary existence of this ground is thus also never actually given. Thus the proof of the existence of God as the necessarily existing ground of all possibility does not work.

Kant's criticism of this argument thus does not actually turn on his initial statement that it does not signify the objective relation of an actual object to other things, but remains confined to the relation of an idea to concepts; his criticism is that we never really possess complete concepts of any particular things nor the complete idea of the sum of all possibilities that would have to be presupposed by such concepts. But the general claim that we cannot simply move from the sphere of concepts to the sphere of actual existents is, of course, the gist of Kant's critique of the ontological argument. So let us now turn to Kant's critique of that argument and of the cosmological and physico-theological arguments, which he claims depend upon it.

4 "The Ideal of Pure Reason" II: Kant's Critique of the Three Traditional Proofs of the Existence of God

(i) *The ontological argument.*[13] Kant follows the critique of the idea of the ideal of God just considered with an argument that it is the cosmological argument as already described in the "Fourth Antinomy" that comes most naturally to human reason, but that even though its inference from a necessary being to a perfect being, from an *ens necessarium* to an *ens realissimum*, is permissible, this still remains within a mere circle of concepts, and the reality of such a being remains to be proved. But the concept of a perfect or maximally real being seems to offer an escape from this circle, by means of the further premise that existence itself is a perfection that a being so conceived must have (*CPR* A 583–90/B 611–19). This is the ontological argument originally developed by St. Anselm and then reintroduced

---

[13] Obviously the vast literature on Kant's critique of the ontological argument cannot be reviewed here. For two helpful accounts, see Byrne (2007, 22–31), and Abaci (2019, 228–48).

into modern philosophy by René Descartes, although Kant does not mention the name of Descartes for some pages (*CPR* A 602/B 630).[14] But, as he has done since his earliest work, Kant claims that the ontological argument fails, and with it the cosmological and physico-theological arguments, because even if the latter could prove the existence of a *necessary* being and an *architect* of the world, respectively, neither can prove the existence of a *perfect* being or *ens realissimum*, which is the only candidate for God, without appealing to the doomed ontological argument.

Kant's critique of the ontological argument itself might seem to turn on a technical claim in logic or philosophy of language, namely the premise that "*Being* is obviously not a real predicate" (*CPR* A 598/B 626), and defenders of the ontological argument ever since have tried to show that this is not so obvious after all.[15] But this famous claim is more like the conclusion of Kant's argument than its premise.[16] The argument really turns simply on the difference between concepts and objects and the assumption that something other than a concept is always needed to establish the objective reality of a concept, that is, the actual existence of its object. Seen this way, the ontological argument is simply a casualty of the transition from medieval to modern philosophy, that is from talk about *essences* to the "new way of ideas" or *concepts.*[17] Descartes had put the ontological argument in terms of essence, stating that "existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than the fact that its three angles equal two right angles can be separated from the essence of a triangle,"[18] and since essence can be conceived of as something distinct from anyone's idea of it, in that regard, as something extramental, as soon as the argument is put in these terms it is already on the way to victory. But Kant formulates the argument in terms of concepts—for example, "among all the concepts of possible things the concept of a being having the highest reality would be best suited to the concept of an unconditionally necessary being" (*CPR* A 586/B 614)—and since concepts are for Kant, as for any modern philosopher, only a species of representations (see *CPR* A 320/B 376–7), as soon as the argument

---

14 Kant does not mention the name of St. Anselm in the first *Critique*, but he does describe his target as "The Anselmian or Cartesian Proof," or is at least reported to have done so, in the lectures *Danzig Rational Theology according to Baumbach* (28/2.2:1243.19), translated in Eberhard (1781 in 2016, 143).

15 Byrne (2007, 28–9) points out that Kant does not have to prove that existence is not a predicate; the burden of proof is on the advocate of the ontological argument to prove that it *is*, and simply by showing that there is a coherent alternative way to talk about existence Kant undercuts the proof.

16 See also Abaci (2019, 240–5).

17 See Yolton (1956).

18 Descartes (1985–91, vol. 2, 46).

is put in these terms its battle is already lost.[19] All of Kant's criticisms of the onto-logical argument are at bottom nothing but ways of emphasizing the difference between concepts and their objects, and the only way to undermine Kant's critique of the argument would be to undermine this distinction itself.

Kant is perfectly well aware that "exists" can be used as a predicate in everyday speech, thus that we can say that existence is a predicate of a perfect being (or of any actual being, insofar as we assert its actuality). But to take this grammatical fact as philosophically significant would be an illusion, "the illusion consisting in the confusion of a logical predicate with a real one (i. e., the determination of a thing)" (*CPR* A 598/B 626). For we cannot prove that something exists simply by analyzing its concept; we must first show that the concept *has* an object, thus rendering any proof of existence *from* the concept circular.

Kant's argument can be seen as proceeding in two broad steps. First, even if you allow the inclusion of existence in a concept as one of its predicates, say a "logical" predicate, that does not prove that anything actually exists: you can simply "cancel" the concept or deny that it has objective reality. But second, existence is not a real predicate that is properly included in a concept: it does not add any content to a concept, but only tells us that the concept does have an object—which always requires going beyond the concept itself.[20]

Kant's first claim, using Descartes' own example, is that you can cancel or deny anything that seems to be implied by whatever predicates are included in a concept simply by "canceling" the concept itself, that is, denying that it has an object unless independently proven to have one:

> If I cancel the predicate in an identical judgment and keep the subject, then a contradiction arises; hence I say that the former necessarily pertains to the latter. But if I cancel the subject together with the predicate, then no contradiction arises; for there is *no longer anything* that could be contradicted. To posit a triangle and cancel its three angles is contradictory; but to cancel the triangle together with its three angles is not a contradiction. It is exactly the same with the concept of an absolutely necessary being. If you cancel its existence, then you cancel the thing itself with all its predicates; where then is the contradiction supposed to come from? Outside it there is nothing that would contradict it, for the thing is not supposed to be externally necessary; and nothing internally either, for by cancelling the thing itself, you have at the same time cancelled everything internal. God is omnipotent; that is a necessary judgment. Omnipotence cannot be cancelled if you posit a divinity, i. e., an infinite being. But if you say, *God is not*, then neither omnipotence nor any other of his predicates is given; for they are all

---

19 Wood (1978, 100–3) characterizes Descartes' argument as one from the *essence* or "true and immutable nature" of God, and Kant's criticism as one based on the *concept* of God, but does not emphasize this difference.

20 For a straightforward account of this twofold strategy, see Hick (2006, vol. 7, 16–17).

cancelled together with the subject, and in this thought not the least contradiction shows it-self. (*CPR* A 594–5/B 622–3)

The basic argument is just that once you have included certain predicates within a concept, then of course you cannot deny them of that same concept without con-tradiction; but a mere concept, and therefore nothing in a mere concept, never forces you to assert that it has an object. You cannot deny that a triangle must have three angles, for that is included in the very definition of a triangle, as a tri-angle; but you can perfectly well deny that any triangles exist, at least until one is put before your eyes, in which case your hand is forced not by the concept but by experience (empirical intuition), or by your mind's eye (pure intuition). You can put whatever you want into a concept of God, but that avails you nothing if all you have is a mere concept, not an object—and of course God cannot be put before your eyes, or even before pure intuition, the way a triangle can.

Kant also puts his point in his language of analytic and synthetic judgment. If you have included "the concept of existence, under whatever disguised name," then of course you can assert existence, but only as a "miserable tautology" or an "analytic proposition," in which case "with existence you add nothing to your thought of the thing; but then either the thought that is in you must be the thing itself," which would of course be a blasphemous account of God, "or else you have presupposed an existence as belonging to possibility, and then inferred that existence on this pretext from its inner possibility" (*CPR* A 597/B 625). An as-sertion of existence, in Kant's view, must always be a synthetic judgment. To be sure, that itself implies that existence actually must be a logical predicate, some-thing added to the subject concept in the predicate place of the proposition assert-ed by the synthetic judgment; but it must be added on the basis of something other than the concept itself. The assumption of existence is additional to the definition of the concept: when you use "exists" as a logical predicate, "you have already pos-ited the thing with all its predicates in the concept of the subject *and assumed it to be actual*, and you only repeat that in the predicate" (*CPR* A 597/B 625, emphasis added). None of this depends upon antecedent acceptance of a technical distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions or of a technical concept of positing. It just depends upon recognizing the basic difference between what is contained in a concept and the separate question of whether the concept has an object. If you ac-cept that distinction then you cannot accept the ontological argument.

Finally, Kant argues that existence should not be treated as a real predicate or "real determination" because that would add content to a concept, but when we assert that something exists, we are asserting that a concept has an object, and

we can only do that if the concept remains the same throughout.[21] Kant makes this point with his homely example of a hundred possible dollars: the difference between a hundred possible dollars and a hundred actual dollars is not that the concept of the latter has an additional predicate in contrast to the concept of the former, for in that case the difference between them would be like the difference between the *concept* of a hundred dollars and the *concept* of a hundred and one dollars. The difference between them is that in one case you just have the *idea of a hundred dollars* and in the other case you actually have *a hundred dollars* (*CPR* A 599/B 627). This is not an argument that depends upon the claim that being is not a real predicate, rather, it is the basis for Kant's claim that existence is not a real predicate. Kant makes this clear in a passage in his *Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* (1783–4):

> [T]he fact that a thing exists does not by itself make the thing more perfect; it does not thereby contain any new predicate, but in such a way it is rather posited with all its predicates. The thing was already just as complete in my concept when I thought of it as possible as it is afterward when it actually exists; for otherwise, if existence were a special reality belonging to the thing, it would not be the same thing I had thought before, but more would exist in it than was included in the concept of the object. *Being* is thus obviously not a real predicate, that is, the concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing in order to make it still more perfect. It is only the positing of a thing [...]. (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1027.21–32)

That existence may be a grammatical but is not a real predicate is thus the conclusion of Kant's argument, which itself turns on his basic distinction between concept and object: to say that something exists is not to say something additional about the concept of the thing, but simply to say that the concept of the thing does indeed have an object. The latter is what Kant emphasizes in the conclusion of his discussion of the ontological argument, in which he finally names Descartes as his target. "Thus the famous ontological (Cartesian) proof of the existence of a highest being from concepts is only so much trouble and labor lost, and a human being can no more become richer in insight from mere ideas than a merchant could in resources if he wanted to improve his financial state by adding a few zeros to his cash balance" (*CPR* A 602/B 631).

(ii) *The cosmological argument.* This argument is that any contingent being implies the existence of a necessary being, and then "infers from the previously given unconditioned necessity of some being or other to the unbounded reality of this being, thus setting everything on the track of a species of inference that, whether reasonable or sophistical, is at least natural" (*CPR* A 604/B 632). Thus Kant is often interpreted as holding that the cosmological argument needs a second step to go

---

21 See Byrne (2007, 28), and Abaci (2019, 240–3).

from a necessary to a perfect being, and as appealing to the ontological argument to take that second step, which is of course doomed by the failure of the ontological argument.[22] But Kant actually claims that "it is really only the ontological proof from mere concepts that contains *all* the force of proof in the so-called cosmological proof; and the supposed experience," of some object or other, whether any external object or just oneself, from which the cosmological argument is supposed to begin, "is quite superfluous—perhaps leading us only to the concept of a necessary being but, not so as to establish this concept in any determinate thing" (*CPR* A 607/ B 635, emphasis added).[23] This suggests that the argument from the contingent existence of anything to the necessary existence of something is unsound, and that a further argument is necessary not only to prove that the necessary being is also the perfect being, not just *ens necessarium* but *ens realissimum*, but to prove the existence of a necessary being in the first place. This is consistent with the "Fourth Antinomy," for there Kant has already argued that there can be no sound theoretical inference from contingent existence to necessary existence. Without the ontological argument, the cosmological argument can prove nothing except again the obvious, that we have the *idea* of a necessary being. Only the ontological argument purports to be able to take us from concepts to objects, but of course it cannot.

Kant's exposition begins with what is in fact Moses Mendelssohn's version of the cosmological proof starting from my knowledge of my own existence, as presented in his "Essay on Evidence":

> It goes as follows: If something exists, then an absolutely necessary being also has to exist. Now I myself, at least, exist, therefore an absolutely necessary being exists. The minor premise contains an experience, the major premise an inference from an experience in general to the existence of something necessary. Thus the proof really starts from experience, so it is not carried out entirely *a priori* or ontologically; and because the object of all possible experience is called "world," it is therefore termed the *cosmological* proof. (*CPR* A 604–5/B 632–3)

The argument seems to have the epistemological advantage over the ontological argument of starting from experience, so that whatever follows from it will be accredited by experience. Then it attempts to proceed from its proof of necessary being to the further proof that this necessary being is the perfect being or *ens realissimum* by what is not so much the ontological proof as its converse, an argument that necessary existence implies perfect being rather than that perfection implies necessary existence:

22 For example, Byrne (2007, 32).
23 For discussion of whether the ontological argument renders the cosmological argument completely otiose, see also Wood (1978, 123–30).

> Now the proof further infers: The necessary being can be determined only in one single way, i.e., in regard to all possible predicates, it can be determined by only one of them, so consequently it must be *thoroughly* determined through its concept. Now only one single concept of a thing is possible that thoroughly determines the thing *a priori*, namely that of an *ens realissimum:* Thus the concept of the most real being is the only single one through which a necessary being can be thought, i.e., there necessarily exists a highest being. (*CPR* A 605–6/B 633–4)

That is, the argument purports to prove that a necessary being must also be a perfect being, not the other way around. But this argument is opaque: it is not clear where the premise that a necessary being can be determined only by a single predicate and therefore must be thoroughly determined by that predicate, a job for which only the predicate of *ens realissimum*, a being that contains all reality, is suitable, is coming from. In fact, Kant must be entertaining a typical rationalist assumption, that a necessary being must be self-determined, because if it were determined by anything other than itself it would be dependent on that other and therefore contingent, and then equating being determined by multiple predicates with being determined by something outside itself and therefore with being contingent rather than necessary.

But even if this equation is problematic, that is not the real problem with this completion of the cosmological argument. The problem is still that it cannot successfully take us outside of the circle of our ideas.[24] Our idea of conditioned being may take us to the idea of unconditioned being, and our idea of unconditioned or necessary being may take us to the idea of perfect being or the *ens realissimum.* But as the "Fourth Antinomy" has already shown, all that is just conceiving of possibility, not actuality. That is why Kant now argues that the cosmological argument depends not on the *converse* of the ontological argument, that necessary being must be perfect being, but on the ontological argument itself, that perfect being must be necessary being. Only this argument, so it purports, can take us beyond the circle of our own ideas in a way that would apparently circumvent the limitation revealed by the "Fourth Antinomy." Of course, this refuge has already been shown to fail too.

The twist occurs in this passage:

> [T]he cosmological proof avails itself of […] experience only to make a single step, namely to the existence of a necessary being in general. What this being might have in the way of properties, the empirical ground of proof cannot teach; rather, here reason says farewell to it entirely and turns its inquiry back to mere concepts: namely, to what kinds of properties in general an absolutely necessary being would have to have […] Now reason believes it meets with

---

24 This point is stressed by Bennett (1974, 246).

these requisites solely and uniquely in the concept of a most real being, and so it infers: that it is the absolutely necessary being. But it is here that one presupposes that the concept of a being of the highest reality completely suffices for the concept of an absolute necessity in existence, i. e., that from the former the latter may be inferred—a proposition the ontological proof asserted, which one thus assumes in the cosmological proof and takes as one's ground, though one had wanted to avoid it [...]. Thus it is really only the ontological proof from mere concepts that contains all the force of proof in the so–called cosmological proof; and the supposed experience is quite superfluous—perhaps leading us only to the concept of a necessary being, but not so as to establish this concept in any determinate being. (*CPR* A 606–7/B 634–5)

The claim that the cosmological proof derives all its force from the ontological proof would make no sense if the cosmological proof had really established the existence of a necessary being and all that remained to be added was a proof that the necessary being is also a perfect being. But in fact the "Fourth Antinomy" has shown, in different language, that the cosmological proof can only lead to the concept of a necessary being, not to knowledge of its existence. Nothing remains but to turn to the ontological proof not just for the equation of the necessary being with the *ens realissimum* but also for the proof that the latter necessarily exists. But that proof has already been shown to be a failure.

(iii) *The physico-theological proof.* Finally, Kant claims that the physico-theological proof, the traditional argument from design, depends upon the cosmological proof, which however has been shown to depend on the failed ontological argument. The claim that the physico-theological proof depends upon the cosmological proof may seem surprising. The physico-theological proof appears to be that the design that we observe in the world, which certainly goes beyond what can be produced by human agency, must be produced by a greater than human agency; its problem would then be that since any merely comparative measure of the greatness by which this agency exceeds human agency—such as "*very great*, or 'astonishing' or 'immeasurable power' and 'excellence"—is indeterminate, this step would not suffice to reach a "determinate concept [...] that [...] comprehends the whole of possible perfections [...] only the All (*omnitudo*) of reality is thoroughly determinate in its concept" (*CPR* A 628/B 656). That is, the argument is not sufficient to prove the existence of an *ens realissimum* or genuinely perfect God (as of course David Hume argued in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, published in German the same year as Kant's *Critique*). But that is not the objection that Kant makes. Instead, he presents the argument as turning on the *contingency* of the organization of the world, "the contingency of the form, but not of the matter, i. e., of substance, in the world [...] that the things of the world would in themselves be unsuited for such an order and harmony in accordance with universal laws if they were not in *their substance* the product of a highest wisdom" (*CPR* A 627/B 655).

> After one has gotten as far as admiring the magnitude of the wisdom, power, etc., of the world's author, and cannot get any further, then one suddenly leaves this argument carried out on empirical grounds and goes back to the contingency that as inferred right at the beginning from the world's order and purposiveness. Now one proceeds from this contingency alone, solely through transcendental concepts, to the existence of something absolutely necessary, and then from the concept of the absolute necessity of the first cause to its thoroughly determinate or determining concept, namely that of an all-encompassing reality. Thus the physico-theological proof, stymied in its undertaking, suddenly jumps over to the cosmological proof, and [...] this is only a concealed ontological proof [...]. (*CPR* A 629/B 657)

—and we know how the ontological proof fares. In other words, the physico-theological argument turns out to be just another way of emphasizing the contingency of the existence of which we do have knowledge, but no more than any other argument from contingency can it get past the idea of a necessary being to the actuality of a necessary being.

In spite of this criticism, Kant maintains, as had Moses Mendelssohn,[25] that this "proof always deserves to be named with respect. It is the oldest, clearest, and the most appropriate to common human reason." "It enlivens the study of nature, just as it gets its existence from this study and through it receives ever renewed force. It brings in ends and aims where they would not have been discovered by our observation itself, and extends our information about nature through the guiding thread of a particular unity whose principle is outside nature" (*CPR* A 623/B 651). This anticipates the argument of the "Appendix" to the "Transcendental Dialectic" and the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment" in the third *Critique* that the idea of a designer of nature is a valuable guide for discovering the intricate ways in which nature actually works, although in both of those places Kant will stress that this idea is heuristic and regulative. But Kant's main point in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that the idea of a highest being which "remains for the merely speculative use of reason a mere but nevertheless *faultless ideal* [...] whose objective reality cannot of course be proved" by the "whole of human cognition" may nevertheless be justified as part of a "moral theology that can make good this lack" (*CPR* A 641/B 669). In the remainder of this chapter, we will look briefly at Kant's claim that the idea of God has a valuable, indeed indispensable theoretical but regulative use, and then we will examine his first stab at his moral theology in the "Canon of Pure Reason."

---

25 See Mendelssohn's "Essay on Evidence" in Mendelssohn (1997, 291–3).

5 The Regulative Theoretical Use of the Idea of God

The "Appendix" to the "Transcendental Dialectic" (*CPR* A 642–704/B 670–732) is divided into two parts, "On the Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason" (*CPR* A 642/B 670) and "On the Final Aim of the Natural Dialectic of Pure Reason" (*CPR* A 669/B 697). It does not purport to provide a new proof of the existence of God based on any theoretical use of that concept. Rather, in line with Kant's underlying teleological presupposition that all products of reason must "have their good and purposive vocation in regard to the natural predisposition of our reason" (*CPR* A 669/B 697) as long as they are properly used, it aims to show that ideas naturally, indeed inevitably produced by reason must have a proper, indeed indispensable use even if the objective reality of such ideas cannot be proved. Kant's ultimate aim is to demonstrate the indispensable use of the ideas of reason in a practical context and to show that this yields sufficient grounds for rational belief in the existence of God. But first Kant wants to show that the idea of God has an indispensable use in theoretical knowledge that is compatible with the theoretical indemonstrability of its objective reality.

The first half of the "Appendix" is intended to show that the idea of the systematicity of our empirical concepts, including concepts of the particular laws of nature, is a necessary condition of the "coherent use of the understanding" and of "empirical truth," thus that "we simply have to presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary" (*CPR* A 651/B 679).[26] There is no mention of God in this discussion. In the second part of the "Appendix", however, Kant asserts that

> (in regard to theology) we have to consider everything that might ever belong to the context of possible experience *as if* this experience constituted an absolute unity, but one dependent through and through, and always still conditioned within the world of sense, yet at the same time *as if* the sum-total of all appearances (the world of sense itself) had a single supreme and all-sufficient ground outside its range, namely an independent, original, and creative reason [...] *as if* the objects themselves had arisen from the image of all reason [...]. It is not from a highest intelligence that we derive the order of the world and its systematic unity, but rather it is from the idea of a most wise cause that we take the rule that reason is best off using for its own satisfaction when it connects up causes and effects in the world. (*CPR* A 672–3/B 700–1)

---

26 Whether this claim represents a revision of Kant's confidence that we have *a priori* cognition of the transcendental unity of apperception without any such presupposition is a complicated issue I will not get into here; see Guyer (2005, ch. 1–3).

The rule that reason takes from the idea of a most wise cause is presumably that everything in the world is well-designed for some good purpose, so that seeking ends and means to them in nature will be our best path to discovering how nature actually works. Kant does not devote much effort to spelling out how this idea is actually supposed to guide empirical research into nature. He is more concerned with showing on the one hand that "in this idea we can allow certain anthropomorphisms, which are expedient for the regulative principle we are thinking of, without fear or blame" (*CPR* A 697/B 725), precisely because, on the other hand,

> [o]ne mistakes the significance of this idea right away if one takes it to be the assertion, or even only the presupposition, of an actual thing to which one would think of ascribing the ground for the systematic constitution of the world; rather, one leaves it entirely open what sort of constitution in itself this ground, which eludes our concepts, might have, and posits an idea only as a unique standpoint from which alone one can extend the unity that is so essential to reason and so salutary to the understanding. (*CPR* A 681/B 709)

Kant's supposition seems to be that we are constitutionally unable to think of design without thinking of a designer, and unable to think of a designer without thinking of the purpose or purposes of its design. Attempting to block this thought would stymie our investigation of nature, and allowing it is supposed to promote the latter.

Kant returns to this line of thought in the "Introduction" to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Sections IV and V), but in the second half of that work, the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment", he argues in particular that the only candidate for a "final purpose" (*Endzweck*) of nature is *our own* moral development, so that we ought to look at nature as if that were the ultimate purpose (*letzter Zweck*) of it as a system as a whole. The third *Critique* is beyond the brief of this chapter.[27] So we can instead take this as our cue to turn now to Kant's first attempt at a moral proof of the existence of God in the *Critique of Pure Reason.*

6 The Moral Proof of the Existence of God in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

Kant presented his "moral theology," including his moral proof of the existence of God, in each of his three *Critiques.* Indeed, it is the culminating argument in each, so it was evidently of great importance to him. The details vary in each presentation, but the outline of the argument remains the same. It can be summed up in

---

27 For my interpretation of this argument, see Guyer (2001).

three propositions. First, a combination of good will, as worthiness to be happy,[28] and actual happiness is the "highest good" or complete and necessary object of morality itself. Second, in order for action directed at an end to be rational, the agent must be able to believe in the real possibility of that end, that is, believe not just that the concept of that end is free of any internal contradiction, but that any further conditions for the existence of the object of the concept can be satisfied. Third, rational belief in the real possibility of the realization of the highest good requires rational belief in the actual existence of God (and in personal immortality, which I will not discuss here).[29] Kant always stresses that rational belief in the existence of God is not the same as theoretical cognition of it, which he has shown to his satisfaction to be unavailable; thus he stresses in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that "the conviction is not *logical* but *moral* certainty, and, since it depends on subjective grounds (of moral disposition) I must not even say '*It is* morally certain that there is a God,' etc., but rather '*I am* morally certain,' etc." (*CPR* A 829/B 857). But, as Kant stresses in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, such moral certainty must be more than mere wish-fulfillment (*CprR* 5:143).

Here I will focus on two issues that arise for all versions of Kant's argument, but specifically for the version of the argument presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[30] First, what exactly is Kant's conception of the highest good, and why is the highest good the necessary object of morality? Second, why does rational belief in the possibility of the highest good require belief in the actual existence of God, and what exactly is the epistemic status of this belief?

In the first *Critique*, Kant presents his argument in a section of the "Doctrine of Method" called the "Canon of Pure Reason." He claims that only in the case of its practical use can pure reason provide "the sum-total of *a priori* principles of the correct use" of a cognitive faculty (*CPR* A 796/B 824); all other correct uses of our cognitive faculties require the addition of some experience. Kant then begins his argument about the highest good with the statement that:

---

28 Kant sometimes says "morality" and sometimes says "virtue." He defines virtue in the "Doctrine of Virtue" of the *Metaphysics of Morals* as the strength of will to be moral rather than the purity of the moral will as such, and "morality" is misleading because it is responsible for setting happiness as well as good will as part of the complete object of morality. But for the sake of simplicity I will typically say "morality" in what follows.
29 See Guyer (2016b).
30 I have discussed Kant's treatment of the highest good and the postulates of pure practical reason in Guyer (2005, ch. 10), Guyer (2014, 265–73); and Guyer (2011). Other important discussions include Wood (1970) and Byrne (2007, ch. 5 and 6). For collections, see Aufderheide and Bader (2015) and Höwing (2016).

> Now in an intelligible world, i.e., in the moral world, in the concept of which we have ab-
> stracted from all hindrances to morality (of the inclinations), [...] a system of happiness pro-
> portionately combined with morality can also be thought as necessary, since freedom, partly
> moved and partly restricted by moral laws, would itself be the cause of the general happiness,
> and rational beings, under the guidance of such principles, would themselves be the authors
> of their own enduring welfare and at the same time that of others. (*CPR* A 809/B 837)

In a world where morality was unhindered by inclinations, there would presum-
ably be no evil, so morality would be as great as is humanly possible; happiness
proportionately combined with that would therefore also presumably be the great-
est possible; there is no suggestion here that the highest good would include *un*hap-
piness, in the form of punishment, for the morally *un*worthy. This statement de-
fines what may be called the collective rather than individualistic conception of
the highest good: it is the greatest morality in all combined with the greatest hap-
piness for all throughout the world.

The question is why this should be the complete object of morality, or charac-
teristic of a moral world, when Kant so often insists that the fundamental principle
of morality has nothing to do with happiness at all. Kant offers no explanation of
this in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but the second and third formulations of the
categorical imperative in Section II of the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Mo-
rals* contain the answer: the second formula commands that the humanity in every
person be treated always as an end, never merely as a means (*GMM* 4:48–9); if hu-
manity is then defined as the capacity of rational beings to set themselves ends
(*GMM* 4:437; *MM* 6:387, 392), this means that the capacity of each rational being
to set her own ends must always be treated as an end and never merely as a
means; and these premises lead to the third formulation of the categorical imper-
ative, that we all ought to act so as to bring about a "realm of ends," a "whole both
of rational beings as ends in themselves and of the ends of his own that each may
set himself" (*GMM* 4:433.22–3). But happiness of one person is nothing other than
the realization of the greatest compossible set of ends that she sets for herself, and
the greatest happiness possible in the world is nothing other than the realization
of the greatest interpersonally compossible set of ends. So what morality com-
mands, and what would result from the greatest morality possible throughout
the world, would be nothing other than the greatest happiness possible throughout
the world, consistently with morality—the highest good.

However, Kant next argues in the first *Critique*, this is only an idea, for not ev-
eryone throughout the world actually does his part (*CPR* A 810/B 838), and since
what one person does typically affects the happiness of others, even the virtuous
cannot expect actually to enjoy all the happiness that they are due in the world.
But then, Kant claims, "the majestic ideas of morality" will not be "incentives
for resolve and realization" even for the virtuous, "because they would not fulfill

the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined *a priori* and necessarily through the very same pure reason" (*CPR* A 813/B 841). Kant never wants the expectation of their own happiness to become the incentive for moral agents to be moral in the first place, so what he must mean is that although the expectation of happiness is not the morally worthy reason for acting morally, still, if they cannot reasonably expect their own happiness, the resolve of even morally-motivated agents to be moral will be weakened. This may sound un-Kantian, but Kant repeats the thought in his lectures on theology from the years immediately following the *Critique.* Thus he asks in the *Pölitz Lectures* "Why should I make myself worthy of happiness through morality if there is no being who can give me this happiness?" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1072.22–4), and in the *Danzig Lectures Baumbach* he says that "[t]he concept of God is necessary for providing objective reality to moral laws, and further for providing them an incentive and sufficient power for directing our will" (*Danzig Rat. Theol. Baumbach* 28/2.2:1284.1–3). More fully, in the *Critique* he states that although the "sensible world" does not offer the happiness of which the virtuous are fully worthy, "we must assume" such a moral world "to be a world that is future for us. Thus God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us in accordance with principles of that very same reason" (*CPR* A 811/B 839). If we must believe that even our worthiness to be happy will not be accompanied in our worldly life in accordance with natural laws, we must believe that there is a god who will grant us the happiness we deserve in another life.

Over the courses of his writings subsequent to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant gradually drops the individualistic conception of the highest good and along with it the promise of individual immortality, but he always retains the practical postulate, as he comes to call it, of the existence of God: in order for it to be rational for us to work towards the greatest morality combined with the greatest happiness throughout the world, meaning at some point in the natural life of the human species even if not in our own natural lives or those of our own generation of human beings, we must still believe that there exists a God who makes happiness the ultimate result of morality in accordance with the laws of nature that are grounded in him as much as is the moral laws itself. Kant's premise is that it cannot be rational to act towards a goal that we know to be impossible; this would not merely weaken our resolve to work toward that goal, but rationally should entirely eliminate it, on the ground that our effort to realize that goal would already be known to be pointless. So on any account of the highest good, we must be able to believe that its realization is possible in order rationally to work toward it. Kant always claims that such a belief also requires belief in the actual existence of God.

But this brings us to our second question: what sort of belief would this be, and is it really necessary to make trying to be moral rational? In the second *Critique*, Kant defines the postulates of pure practical reason as theoretical judgments accepted as "*belong*[ing] *inseparably to the practical interest* of pure reason" (*CprR* 5:121.9–10). In the first *Critique*, however, Kant makes it clear that such acceptance does not stand at any point on a spectrum of assent to or confidence in propositions ranging from mere opinion, in which we know that we have insufficient evidence for something that might be provably true, to full-blown knowledge, where "taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient" (*CPR* A 822/B 850), that is, where we take ourselves to have sufficient evidence for something that is objectively true. Rational belief is not part of this spectrum. It is not something that I think probable enough to wager on, or that I think could be confirmed by some theoretical means, even if only one not currently available to me—as I might believe that even though there are none now there might someday be means sufficient to confirm "that there are also inhabitants of other worlds" (*CPR* A 825/B 853). In the face of inadequate evidence, a doctor might have no choice but to wager on the accuracy of a diagnosis or the efficacy of a treatment, but in the fullness of time adequate evidence for the right diagnosis or the right treatment might be obtained. However, I cannot imagine any circumstances under which I could obtain theoretically adequate evidence for an assertion of the existence of God. Yet, Kant says, in the case of "*moral belief*"

> it is absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points. The end here is inescapably fixed, and according to all my insight there is possible only a single condition under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity, namely, that there be a god and a future world; I also know with complete certainty that no one else knows of any other conditions that lead to this same unity of ends under the moral law. But since the moral precept is thus at the same time my maxim (as reason commands that it ought to be, I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted. (*CPR* A 828/B 856)

But is Kant's reasoning persuasive? It might be if he could claim that as a condition of the rationality of attempting to bring about the highest good as what morality commands or demands as its complete object, I must know that if I perform the actions morality commands of me, or if we all take the actions morality commands of us, the highest good *will* result—then we might be able to claim that, as the only adequate explanation of the realization of the highest good, God does exist. But does rationality demand that much? Might it not be rational to attempt to do what morality requires of us, given how important that is, as long as we can be-

lieve that what we are working towards *might* come about, or is *possible*, or as long as we have adequate grounds to believe that it is *not impossible?* And would it not be sufficient to believe that the highest good is not impossible that the existence of the ground of its possibility is itself *not impossible?* In other words, that the existence of God is *not impossible?* And indeed, have we not already been given sufficient grounds for believing *that* by Kant's argument the existence of God can no more be theoretically disproven than it can be theoretically proven? Is not that fact alone sufficient to make it rational to attempt to bring about the highest good, given that morality itself commands that?

This brings us back to the question, what exactly is the epistemic status of rational belief in the existence of God supposed to be? Kant has made it clear that although the *content* of the belief is an ordinary theoretical proposition, the *basis* for belief in such a proposition is not any ordinary kind of empirical or *a priori* evidence; so the belief is not a theoretical belief. A natural interpretation of the idea of a practically-grounded belief might be that it is grounded in an act of the will rather than the intellect. But Kant makes it clear in the second *Critique* that we cannot be "commanded" or have a *duty* to believe because a belief is not an act of the will. The "moral necessity" of believing in the existence of God "is *subjective*, that is, a need, and not *objective*, that is, itself a duty; for there can be no duty to assume the existence of anything (since this concerns only the theoretical use of reason)" (*CprR* 5:125.31–4).[31] Yet he also takes refuge in the opaque assertion that a "pure practical rational belief" is a "voluntary [*freiwillig*] determination of our judgment, conducive to the moral purpose and moreover harmonizing with the theoretical need of reason to assume that existence and to make it the basis of the further use of reason" (*CprR* 5:146.6–10). The last part of this is clearer than the first: it is not clear exactly what a "voluntary determination of our judgment" is supposed to be, but it seems that in the end all that Kant is saying is that we have to be able to believe in the theoretical conditions of the possibility of realizing a goal that we are morally commanded to try to achieve. This seems to be a state of the intellect, not of the will, although not one that can be justified on any ordinary empirical or *a priori* evidence.[32] So again we must ask, is anything more necessary for this than that we have adequate *theoretical* grounds for knowing that the existence of this condition of impossibility is *not impossible?* And again, is that not exactly what Kant has provided with his proof that the existence of God is neither provable nor disprovable, if indeed he has proven that? Just focus-

---

31 This passage is cited at Byrne (2007, 87).

32 Byrne (2007, 89) puts this point by arguing, under the rubric of the "transparency of belief," that there is no difference between believing some proposition *p* and believing that *p* is true.

ing on Kant's argument the existence of God cannot be proven, as Mendelssohn did, might lead to the assumption that something more needs to be done to show that the existence of God as the condition of the possibility of the realization of the highest good is possible; but recognizing that Kant's argument is also that the existence of God cannot be disproven by any theoretical means may mean precisely that nothing more needs to be done—at least not in the face of the indisputable moral imperative of working towards this end.

References

Primary sources

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb (1739/⁴1757), *Metaphysics: A Critical Translation with Kant's Elucidations, Selected Notes and Related Materials*, ed. and trans. by Courtney Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Eberhard, Johann August (1781), *Preparation for Natural Theology*, ed. by Courtney D. Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

Descartes, René, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–91).

Heine, Heinrich, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, ed. by Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. by Fritz Bamberger *et. al.*, continued by Alexander Altmann *et. al.*, 24 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1929–).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Morning Hours*, trans. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Last Works*, trans. by Bruce Rosenstock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

Secondary sources

Abaci, Uygar. *Kant's Revolutionary Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Al-Azm, Sadik, J. *The Origins of Kant's Arguments in the Antinomies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

Aufderheide, Joachim/ Bader, Ralf, eds., *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Bennett, Jonathan F., *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

Byrne, Peter, *Kant on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

Greer, Michelle, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Guyer, Paul, "The Unity of Reason: Pure Reason as Practical Reason in Kant's Early Conception of the Transcendental Dialectic," *Monist* 72 (1989), 139–67. Reprinted in Guyer 2000, 60–95.

Guyer, Paul, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Guyer, Paul, "From Nature to Morality: Kant's New Argument in the 'Critique of Teleological Judgment'," in *Architektonik und System in der Philosophie Kants*, ed. by Hans-Friedrich Fulda and Jürgen Stolzenberg (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), 375–404. Reprinted in Guyer 2005, 314–42.

Guyer, Paul, "Kantian Communities: The Realm of Ends, the Ethical Community, and the Highest Good," in *Kant and the Concept of Community*, ed. by Charlton Payne and Lucas Thorpe (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 88–120. Reprinted in Guyer 2016a, 275–302.

Guyer, Paul, *Kant* (London: Routledge, 2014, 2nd ed.).

Guyer, Paul, "Kant, Mendelssohn, and Immortality," in *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Thomas Höwing (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2016), 157–80.

Guyer, Paul, *Virtues of Freedom: Selected Essays on Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016a).

Henrich, Dieter. *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis: Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960).

Hick, John Harwood, "Ontological Argument for the Existence of God," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Donald M. Borchert, 10 vols. (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 1967, 2006, 2nd ed.), vol. 7, 15–19.

Höwing, Thomas, ed., *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy* (Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter, 2016).

Insole, Christopher, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism and Newton's Divine Sensorium," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72 (2011), 413–26.

Insole, Christopher, *Kant and the Creation of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Sammons, Jeffrey L. *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

Stang, Nicholas F., "Kant's Possibility Proof," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.3 (2010), 275–99.

Stang, Nicholas F., "Kant's Argument that Existence is not a Determination," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 41 (2015), 583–626.

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

Yolton, John W., *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

Oliver Sensen

The Practical Proof in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*

Introduction

At first glance, Kant presents the following argument for the existence of God in the "Dialectic" of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (see *CprR* 5:107.1–148.5):

> One ought to bring about the highest good.
> Ought implies can.
> It needs God to bring about the highest good.
> God exists.

Kant seems to state the argument explicitly in the following passage: "It is a duty to realize the highest good to the utmost of our capacity; therefore it must be possible; hence it is also unavoidable for every rational being in the world to assume what is necessary for its objective possibility." (*CprR* 5:144.33–7) Kant also specifies that the assumption of God is necessary for the possibility of the highest good: "the highest good in the world is possible only insofar as a supreme cause of nature having a causality [...] is assumed," and he goes on to say that this "supreme cause of nature [...] is, *God*." (*CprR* 5:125.14–22) So, Kant seems to use the duty to bring about the highest good as a proof that God exists.[1]

However, even Kant scholars sympathetic to his philosophy are skeptical that this argument works. Many scholars argue that Kant's reasoning does not establish *theoretical* knowledge of God's existence. Some point out that Kant puts forward the reasoning as a *practical* proof, i.e., as providing moral faith for our practice (Wood 1970, 145–52). Others limit the strength of the argument further by saying that it comes from a subjective necessity of our reason (Sala 2004, 292), or that

1 Kant presents an almost identical argument in the "Canon" of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (see *CPR* A 795–819/B 823–47). However, I shall focus on the second *Critique*, since the "Canon" proof would lead to a contradiction, as I shall argue below.

the function of the argument is merely to regulate our practice (DiCenso 2011, 216). Other scholars hold that Kant's reasoning does not even establish that much, but only satisfies the needs of an "all-too-human reason" (Beck 1960, 254), or even stronger that the argument fails completely in that one does not need to assume the existence of God in order to pursue the ideal of the highest good (see Sussman 2015, 220).

In this paper, I shall argue that Kant himself qualifies his argument in three important respects: (1) Kant weakens the first premise by arguing that only part of the highest good is commanded, because not all of it is in our power (Section 1). (2) Kant also qualifies the second premise of the argument by saying that an 'ought' in this context merely implies a *hope* that one can achieve something (Section 2). (3) Furthermore, Kant explicitly says about the third premise that one has a *choice* in whether one assumes God or nature as the cause that could bring about the highest good (Section 3). All of this together underscores, so I shall argue, that Kant does not put forward the above argument as a proof for the existence of God, but to solve an antinomy of reason (Section 4). The argument is meant to be one way in which we can fulfill a need of reason and remove an obstacle for our moral practice.

1 The Highest Good

What exactly does the first premise: "It is a duty to realize the highest good to the utmost of our capacity; therefore it must be possible" (*CprR* 5:144.33–5), or in short: 'one ought to bring about the highest good' demand of an agent? In order to evaluate Kant's argument, it is important to clarify the command to bring about the highest good. In particular, it helps to answer the following three questions: (1) What is the highest good? (2) What is the justification for the claim that one should bring it about? (3) What exactly does one have to do? I shall examine each question in turn.

(1) On the surface, Kant's account of the highest good seems clear and straightforward. He specifies early on that he does not conceive of the highest good as the "supreme," but as the "complete" (*CprR* 5:110.14–15) good of a human being. Already in the *Groundwork*, he argues that only a good will is unconditionally and supremely good (see *GMM* 4:393.5–24). However, if a good will is also happy, then the good is complete. Kant justifies his conception of the highest good by saying: "That *virtue* (as worthiness to be happy) is [...] the *supreme* good has been proved in the Analytic." (*CprR* 5:110.18–22) In the "Dialectic," his focus is on "the whole and complete good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings" and "for this, *happiness* is also required" (*CprR* 5:110.22–4). Kant specifies

happiness in this context as "the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence *everything goes according to his wish and will*" (*CprR* 5:124.21–3). Happiness includes the particular wishes one has, and, therefore, takes note of the sensible side of one's nature as well (contrast Bader 2015, 185; and Fugate 2014).

Furthermore, the two elements—virtue and happiness—come together in such a way that "happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality" (*CprR* 5:110.33–4) forms the highest good. The idea of proportionality seems to be introduced by Kant's claim earlier in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the "*good [...] must not be determined before the moral law [...] but only [...] after it and by means of it*" (*CprR* 5:63.1–4, see *GMM* 4:436.1–2). If the categorical imperative: "[s]o act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in giving universal law" (*CprR* 5:30.38–9) determines what is good, then "happiness [...] is not itself absolutely and in all respects good but always presupposes morally lawful conduct as its condition" (*CprR* 5:111.2–5; see Engstrom 1992, 751–8).

However, while on the face of it the definition of the highest good—as happiness in exact proportion to virtue—seems clear, scholars have pointed out several ambiguities within the concept of the highest good, and these ambiguities could affect what exactly the first premise demands of the agent. For instance, is Kant concerned with *the agent's own* highest good, or with the good of *the world at large* (see Bader 2015, 202)? In one and the same paragraph, Kant seems to mention both when he speaks of "the highest good in a *person*" and "of a possible world" (*CprR* 5:110.32–5). Such an ambiguity can change the exact meaning of the practical proof for the existence of God. Whose highest good is one commanded to bring about? Furthermore, is this good—whether of the agent or the world at large—to be realized in this world, or in an afterlife (see Reath 1998; Guyer 2005, 289; Pasternack 2014, 31–6)?

A third ambiguity that could change the nature of the practical proof is a question of the degree to which one should bring about the highest good: Does the highest good only refer to the *maximum* of virtue and happiness, or is it only important that the two stand in the right relation (see Engstrom 1992, 768)? This too can make a difference in what exactly one should do. For instance, if one sees people who lack virtue, should one take away their happiness in order to bring about the right proportion, or does one have to cause virtue as well as maximal happiness?

Kant does not settle all these issues, and in different writings he seems to emphasize different aspects of the highest good (see Pasternack 2014, 31–60). However, one can shed further light on what the relevant conception of the highest good is if one looks at questions (2): why it is commanded to bring about the highest good, and (3): what exactly one has to do.

(2) The first premise of the practical proof commands that one bring about the highest good. But why should one do it? What is the justification for this com-

mand? In particular, there is a debate in the literature whether the highest good is already contained in the commands of the categorical imperative of the *Groundwork* and earlier parts of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, or whether it is an additional command (see Engstrom 1992, 772; Bader 2015, 206; and Kleingeld 2016, 45–7).

For instance, one can argue that the command to bring about the highest good is already contained in the duty to promote the happiness of others Kant puts forward in the *Groundwork* (see *GMM* 4:398.8–399.2[2]). Kant says that we are commanded to "contribute everything possible" (*CprR* 5:119.13–4) to the production of the highest good, and in the *Groundwork* he says that we should promote the happiness of others "as much as possible" (*GMM* 4:430.26). One could object that Kant does not mention the requirement of proportionality in the *Groundwork*. One should promote the happiness of others as much as possible, not just in proportion to their virtue, the exact degree of which one cannot know (see *GMM* 4:406.5–408.11). But Kant does mention proportionality in his earlier discussion of the absolutely good will (see *GMM* 4:393.5–394.31), and one could argue that the proportionality requirement is meant for an omniscient, all-powerful being, who would be able to determine the virtue of others, whereas for finite human beings the demand can only be to bring about the happiness of others (see Engstrom 1992, 772).

Nonetheless, there are further differences between the duty to promote the happiness of others and the duty to bring about the highest good. One difference is that in the *Groundwork* the commands of the categorical imperative refer to maxims, while the highest good demands observable outcomes in the world (see Bader 2015, 206). Another important difference is that in the *Groundwork* one does not need the postulate of God's existence in order to be under the obligation to promote the happiness of others, while it is an explicit part of the command to bring about the highest good (see premise [3] of the practical proof).

A compromise—according to which the duty to bring about the highest good is more than the duty to promote the happiness of others, but still follows directly from the categorical imperative—is to say that the highest good is the *sum* of all the duties the categorical imperative commands (see Kleingeld 2016, 45–7). When Kant introduces the highest good in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he says that it is the "totality of the object of pure practical reason" (*CprR* 5:108.11–2). However, one could raise the same objections against the compromise as we raised before: In the *Groundwork* the commands of the categorical imperative refer to maxims, not an observable outcome in the world, and for the sum of our duties one does not need to postulate the existence of God (as in premise [3] of the practical

---

2 See also *GMM* 4:423.17–35 and *GMM* 4:431.18–27. See Engstrom (1992, 772).

proof), but one merely has to add up all the duties the categorical imperative lays upon us. These differences justify the search for a different solution.

On the one hand, as a moral command, the highest good must be grounded by the categorical imperative. This is because the highest good "belongs to duty" (*CprR* 5:126.1), and all "duties [...] proceed [...] through the *moral imperative*" (*MM* 6:239.16–18). Only the categorical imperative generates a moral duty (see *MM* 6:225.6–8). Accordingly, Kant confirms directly that it is the highest good "the moral law makes it our duty to take as the object of our endeavors" (*CprR* 5:129.24–6, see *Rel.* 6:5.35–6). On the other hand, since the command to bring about the highest good seems to be different from the duties that Kant lists in the *Groundwork* that only refer to the adoption of maxims, and do not need to postulate God, it is possible that it needs an additional step to get from the categorical imperative to the command to bring about the highest good.

Kant indicates this in the "Dialectic" of the second *Critique* when he says that the highest good is "attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid *practical* law" (*CprR* 5:122.24–5), or "necessarily connected with the moral lawgiving of pure reason" (*CprR* 5:124.17–19). If the highest good is necessarily attached to the categorical imperative, then it might need an extra step to get to it. Kant states this directly in the *Religion* when he says that the highest good "exceeds the concept of duty that morality contains (and which does not presuppose any matter [...], but only [...] formal laws)" (*Rel.* 6:6.17–18). The command to bring about the highest good is "introduced by the moral law itself, and yet through it practical reason reaches beyond the law." (*Rel.* 6:6.6–8) It therefore needs an additional step to get from the categorical imperative to the command of the first premise of the practical proof. What is this additional step?

Kant specifies the additional step as a goal or result that is added to the categorical imperative, but that is added necessarily: The highest good is "an a priori necessary object of our will [...] inseparably bound up with the moral law" (*CprR* 5:114.3–4). It is not an empirical wish, but something that "reason points out to all rational beings as the goal of all their moral wishes" (*CprR* 5:115.19–20). Kant also describes this object as "a *purpose* given a priori, that is, an end as object (of the will)" (*CprR* 5:134.9–10). What Kant means by this is that one has a necessary tendency to think about the "success" (*CPR* A 811/B 839), or the *consequences* that come about if one follows the moral command: "it is one of the inescapable limitations of human beings [...] to be concerned in every action with its result, seeking something in it [...] that they can *love*" (*Rel.* 6:7.20–8).

On the face of it, this seems to contradict Kant repeated claims that one should disregard the consequences of one's actions, and to follow the moral law for its own sake instead (see *GMM* 4:394.13–5, *Rel.* 6:7.9–20). Is the highest good an attempt to bring back in happiness after he had abstracted from considerations of happi-

ness in the *Groundwork* and the "Analytic" of the *Critique of Practical Reason?* The controversy around questions like these has become known as the Beck-Silber debate (see Beck 1960, 242–5; Silber 1963). However, Kant himself is aware of this paradox, and states right at the beginning of the "Dialectic" that "the highest good [...] is not [...] to be taken as [...] *determining ground*" of moral actions (*CprR* 5:109.22–3). In other words, when Kant says that the highest good is a necessary end of human actions, he does not mean to say that it is the motive, or the purpose of one's actions. Otherwise, Kant realizes, "we are contradicting ourselves even where everything stands together in the most perfect harmony." (*CprR* 5:110.6–8)[3] So, in which sense is the highest good a necessary end of moral actions?

One can reconcile Kant's claims if one distinguishes different perspectives from which one can contemplate the same action. As Kant emphasizes in the *Groundwork* as well as the "Analytic" of the second *Critique*, one should perform an action simply because it is the right thing to do, i. e., out of respect for the moral law (see *GMM* 4:390.4–6, *GMM* 4:400.17–401.2, *CprR* 5:71.28–72.11). However, this does not mean that one is not also interested in what the results of one's actions are. It is one's limitation that one wants to find something in the outcome of our action that one can love (see *Rel.* 6:7.20–8): "the human being evinces the need, effected in him by morality, of adding to the thought of his duties a final end as well, as their consequence." (*Rel.* 6:6.5–7). This is a different perspective, akin to Butler's "cool hour" (Sermon XI:117) of reflection. Independently of what the right thing to do is, one takes a further interest in what kind of world one creates with one's action. This thought should not motivate one, but it is a "permitted idea" (*GMM* 4:462.32).

What is important to note for our purposes, is that our reflection in a cool hour can again be of different kinds. One can focus on oneself, or the world at large. In the first sense, one might ask: "If I do what I should, what may I then hope?" (*CPR* A 805/B 833) This is a question about the agent's *own* personal happiness, and what results one can hope for oneself. One is interested in whether behaving morally will also make one happy.

However, one can also contemplate what kind of world would come about if *everyone* acted this way, and like an "impartial rational spectator" (*GMM* 4:393.19–20) envision the appropriate rewards for virtuous behavior. This second perspective is an *ideal* viewpoint, in which one is not just a spectator, but contem-

---

3 In the "Canon" of the first *Critique*, first published in 1781, Kant still seems to hold that the highest good serves as an incentive for moral actions (see *CPR* A 811–12/B 839–40, *CPR* A 813/B 841, *CPR* A 815/B 843, but also *CPR* A 819/B 847). This would contradict Kant's later claims, after 1785, that happiness is not an incentive for morality. On the historical development of Kant's views on this topic, see Sensen (2015).

plates the situation from a God's-eye perspective, i. e., "the perfect volition of a rational being that would at the same time have all power, even if we think of such a being only for the sake of the experiment" (*CprR* 5:110.29–31, see *Rel.* 6:6.3–4). From this ideal perspective one can picture what the world at large would be like if virtuous behavior would be rewarded with happiness in exact proportion (see *CPR* A 808/B 836).

These distinctions allow us to specify what exactly one ought to do in order to bring about the highest good.

(3) The first premise of the practical proof is a command to bring about the highest good. What exactly one ought to do depends, I shall argue, on which of the two perspectives one adopts in the cool hour of reflection. If one looks at the world from the *ideal* God's-eye perspective, where one would be omniscient, fully just and all-powerful, one would have a duty to bring about the highest good in the world. One ought to bring about the happiness of others as much as possible (see *GMM* 4:430.26), and one could take no delight in happiness disproportionate to the virtue of other beings (see *GMM* 4:393.20–2), the degree of which one would know because one would be omniscient (see *GMM* 4:406.5–408.11). *However, this is not our actual perspective.* Human beings can take it up "for the sake of the experiment" (*CprR* 5:110.30–1), but this is not our actual situation, and therefore the full realization of the highest good cannot be demanded of a finite agent.

Our actual perspective is the *non-ideal*, human perspective. We are not all-powerful, omniscient, or fully just. Of the two elements of the highest good, virtue and happiness in exact proportion to virtue, *only the first* can be a command for a finite human being to bring about. Only the acquisition of virtue is *"immediately* within our power," while the acquisition of happiness "is not in our power" (*CprR* 5:119.20–3). Since the realization of happiness is not in one's power—and if one adds the second premise, that 'ought implies can'—then one cannot be commanded to bring about happiness in exact proportion to virtue. One does not know how virtuous someone is, including oneself (see *GMM* 406.5–408.11). One also cannot make someone else virtuous, since it requires the adoption of an attitude, and this everyone must do for themselves (see *MM* 6:386.8–14). So, what can be commanded is only that one acquire *one's own* virtue. If one does so, one might have the "expectation of a happiness proportionate" (*CprR* 5:119.3–4), but this is just "an object of hope" (*CprR* 5:129.7). The human perspective is: "If I do what I should, what may I then *hope?*" (*CPR* A 805/B 833, my emphasis)

So, what does one have to do? We have seen before that the command to bring about the highest good does not "increase the number of morality's duties" (*Rel.* 6:5.23–4). Rather, the command is to adopt the right moral disposition, "that is, a disposition conformed with law *from respect* for law" (*CprR* 5:128.5). One should do the right thing, as expressed in the categorical imperative, and do it sim-

ply because it is right: "For, in the case of what is to be morally good it is not enough that it *conform* with the moral law but it must also be done *for the sake of the law*" (*GMM* 4:390.4–6).

What does this mean for the practical proof? One could argue that if the first premise merely amounts to the claim that one should adopt a virtuous disposition, that then the whole argument for the existence of God fails. However, this is not necessarily the case. Kant seems to argue that it needs "supernatural cooperation" (*Rel.* 6:44.25) to acquire full virtue. If it needs God to bring about even the moral limited aspect of the highest good, then we must continue exploring the other premises.

2 'Ought Implies Can'

The second premise of the practical proof is an argument Kant repeatedly presents that one can summarize with the slogan: 'ought implies can' (see *CprR* 5:144.33–7[4]). This premise too seems clear and straightforward on the surface, but if one analyzes it more closely, it becomes ambiguous, and needs further specification. For instance, Kant himself acknowledges a phenomenon of a conscience that is too strong (see *Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27/1:356.38–357.5). For instance, one might sometimes be under the impression that one ought to do more to help others, or work harder, where in fact one cannot do so. So, when exactly is 'ought implies can' valid, and why? The answer gets more complicated because Kant uses the principle in at least two different applications. I shall first lay out the two forms, and then see which application Kant uses in the practical proof.

(1) In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant emphasizes the principle 'ought implies can' in the context of setting limits of what can be morally required. Kant observes: "People are always preaching about what ought to be done, and nobody thinks about whether it can be done [...] Consideration of rules is useless if one cannot make man ready to follow them" (*Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27/1:244.26–36). The principle serves as a check on moral requirements. If someone cannot physically (or logically) do something, it cannot be demanded of him: "thus a man, for example, has no obligation to stop hiccupping, for it is not in his power" (*Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27/1:261.35–6). Used in this context, the principle can also check a conscience that is too strong. If one has a feeling that one should do something that one physically or logically cannot do, one can ignore the feeling as not being morally justified.

---

4 See also *CprR* 5:114.4–9, *CprR* 5:119.11–14, *CprR* 5:125.3–4, *CPR* A 807/B 835.

In this first form of 'ought implies can,' Kant does not try to establish a 'can,' but he uses the principle in a *Modus Tollens* form:

If one ought, then one can. ['Ought implies can.']
One cannot.
Therefore, it is not the case that one ought.

But why is the principle valid? It is important to note that it is not an a priori rule, such as the principle of contradiction, or the categorical imperative. Kant says that an impossible demand would be "useless" (*Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27/1:244.35). In this context, 'ought implies can' is not an axiom, an a priori principle one can use to deduce moral conclusions, rather it is plausible because of pragmatic considerations. If something is (physically or logically) impossible, it is pointless to try to achieve it.

(2) Kant also uses 'ought implies can' in a second way, for instance, earlier in the *Critique of Practical Reason* when he analyzes the gallows example. In this example, a prince demands of one to give false testimony against an innocent man. If one refuses, one will be put to death at the gallows. Although one has no desire to refuse the false testimony, one nonetheless realizes that it would be morally wrong —the accused is innocent—and that one ought to refuse. Kant uses the example to argue that this ought shows one that one *can* act freely, independently of one's desires: "He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him." (*CprR* 5:30.33–5) In short: 'ought implies can.'

This argument has a different direction as the previous one. The conclusion is not that one is not obligated to do something, but that one can do something. It has the structure of a *Modus Ponens:*

If one ought, then one can. ['Ought implies can.']
One ought (to refuse giving false testimony).
Therefore, (one is justified in assuming that) one can.

Why is this reasoning plausible? Notice that Kant does not claim that, as a matter of fact, one can act morally. There is still a gap between the determination of the will, and the action (see *Rel.* 6:46.13–14). So, even if one decides not to give false testimony, one does not know beforehand from which motive one will ultimately act (see *Lect. Met. Morals Vigilantius* 27/2.1:507.8–18). But one also cannot be sure after the action what one's true motivation was (see *GMM* 4:406.5–408.11). The ar-

gument, therefore, only establishes a psychological sense that one can act morally, but it does not prove the reality of it (see also *GMM* 4:448.28–35).

In sum: The first difficulty in applying 'ought implies can' in the practical proof is that the principle is not an axiom, or something that is valid a priori (see also Rödl 2013). Rather, the principle gets its plausibility from other considerations. In the *Modus Tollens* use, it convinces from pragmatic limitations. It is pointless to demand something one has a sense that one cannot do. In the *Modus Ponens* usage, the principle gets its plausibility from a psychological sense. If one has a sense that one ought to do something, it can make one aware that one could do it, all things being equal. 'Ought implies can' is not a constitutive principle of reason. Kant does not believe that if reason commands something autonomously, that nature is necessarily in accord with this (see *CprR* 5:113.29–114.1). It could be that a creator has arranged a harmony between reason and nature, but this is exactly what the practical proof should establish, nothing that we can assume or know at this point. The second difficulty in applying 'ought implies can' is that we must analyze whether Kant uses the principle as a *Modus Tollens* or *Ponens* in the context of the highest good. Indeed, we find both.

2.1 Modus Tollens

In the context of the highest good, Kant uses 'ought implies can' as a *Modus Tollens* when he says: "If, therefore, the highest good is impossible in accordance with practical rules, then the moral law, which commands us to promote it, must be fantastic and directed to empty imaginary ends and must therefore in itself be false." (*CprR* 5:114.6–9) One can read this passage as an argument for the categorical imperative itself (see Pasternack 2014, 49). Kant seems to say that:

> If there is a categorical ought, it commands to bring about the highest good.
> (If) one cannot bring about the highest good.
> (Then) there is no categorical ought.

However, this interpretation seems to be too strong. It is not Kant's view that the existence and validity of the categorical imperative is dependent on the possibility of the highest good, or on God's existence. Kant says this very clearly: "it is not to be understood by this that it is necessary to assume the existence of God *as a ground of all obligation in general* (for this rests, as has been sufficiently shown, solely on the autonomy of reason itself)" (*CprR* 5:125.34–126.1). Furthermore, as we have seen above, the highest good is also not necessary as a motivation or determining ground for the moral law. Kant emphasizes that I "even have in the

moral law a purely intellectual determining ground of my causality" (*CprR* 5:114.35–115.2). So, Kant's *Modus Tollens* is not meant as a justification of the validity or the bindingness of the categorical imperative.

Rather, if we look again at the quote, he says that the categorical imperative would direct one to empty ends. In discussing the first premise, we said that the highest good is the result one contemplates in a cool hour of reflection as the consequence of moral behavior. As such, it is something one can love in moral behavior, or an expectation that is created for a perfectly rational world. If it now turned out that the highest good is not possible, one's hopes for the consequences one loves would be disappointed. As such, the categorical imperative would be "false" (*CprR* 5:114.5), in that it gives rise to false hopes that are not justified. However, this does not mean that the imperative would not be valid and commanding absolutely. In this sense, 'ought implies can' merely points to one's expectation that if one follows the moral law, there will be consequences that one can love. However, the principle is not an a priori axiom, and merely points to one's hopes and expectations. It is not a constitutive principle that could justify the existence of God. But Kant also uses 'ought implies can' in another context when he talks about the highest good.

2.2 Modus Ponens

The main application of 'ought implies can' that is relevant to the practical proof is the *Modus Ponens* form that was indicated in the quote at the beginning of this paper (see *CprR* 5:144.33–7). One ought to bring about the highest good, therefore it must be possible. However, after analyzing the first premise of the practical proof ('One ought to bring about the highest good'), we have seen that there are at least two different conceptions of the highest good: (1) From the agent's perspective, one ought to bring about one's own virtuous disposition, (2) while from an ideal, God's-eye perspective, one ought to bring about happiness in proportion to virtue for the world at large. Accordingly, there will be two *Modus Ponens* arguments, depending on the conception of the highest good involved. I shall look at each in turn.

(1) In the first conception of the highest good, what is commanded is that one pursues one's own virtuous disposition (see premise [1]). Bringing about our own happiness proportionate to one's virtue "is not in our power" (*CprR* 5:119.23), and therefore could not be commanded in light of the *Modus Tollens* application of 'ought implies can.' But does the principle—in the *Modus Ponens* application—establish that one can bring about one's own virtue if it is commanded by the moral

law? Kant presents his most thorough discussion of this question in the *Religion*.[5] There he refers to 'ought implies can' several times in order to argue that if one should adopt a virtuous disposition, one must be able to (see *Rel.* 6:41.20–1[6]).

But does the argument establish that one really can acquire virtue? Kant discusses the question in the context of his claim that all human beings are by nature evil, i. e., they subordinate the claims of the moral law to the demands of their inclinations (see *Rel.* 6:36.19–33). What is needed to become virtuous, is, accordingly, on the one hand to have a "*change of heart*" that reverses this subordination (*Rel.* 6:47.11), and on the other hand to gradually align one's observable behavior with one's basic maxim to always put the moral law supreme (see *Rel.* 6:47.1–10). What is important to note is that Kant, again, does not use 'ought implies can' as an a priori axiom from which one can derive conclusions about the world. What is holding him back is that he cannot explain how one could have a change of heart.

The difficulty is two-fold: First, it is "inscrutable" (*Rel.* 6:21.20[7]), or unintelligible how one could change a maxim of whether the moral law or inclinations are supreme. The change cannot be determined by inclinations, as this would not be free and imputable, but without an inclination one lacks a ground to explain the change. Second, there is the further problem that any decision could not be in time *and* be imputable (see *Rel.* 6:39.9–41.29). If it were in time, the decision would be subject to the laws of causal pre-determinism, and therefore not imputable. If one knows other human beings deep down, one could predict their behavior (see *CPR* A 549–50/B 577–8, *CprR* 5:99.12–9). However, if one could predict others' behavior, how could they change their maxims freely?

As a result, Kant does not claim that 'ought implies can' in this instance. He says that "supernatural cooperation" would be needed, "whether this cooperation only consist in the diminution of obstacles or be also a positive assistance" (*Rel.* 6:44.25–6). Instead, he settles for a weaker conclusion, that 'ought implies *hope* that one can' (see *Rel.* 6:51.12–52.15). This argument is therefore weaker than the gallows example. In the latter the only conclusion Kant needed to reach was that one has a psychological sense that one can act otherwise. In the context of the highest good, he would need to establish the conclusion that—as a metaphysical possibility—one really can change one's maxim. Kant does not

---

5 In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he applies 'ought implies can' to argue from one's virtue to one's immortality, not God's existence (see *CprR* 5:122.1–124.3). To complicate matters further, in the "Canon," Kant uses the postulate of immortality in order to support the hope of achieving happiness (see *CPR* A 809–10/B 837–8), not virtue.

6 See also *Rel.* 6:45.7–9, *Rel.* 6:47.33–6, *Rel.* 6:49.30–2, *Rel.* 6:50.19–21.

7 Also *Rel.* 6:51.16, see *Rel.* 6:25.9–13, *Rel.* 6:32.1–4, *Rel.* 6:43.12–45.15.

strictly apply the principle but settles for the weaker conclusion that "he can hope that what does not lie within his power will be made good by cooperation from above." (*Rel.* 6:52.6–7) In other words: It would need God to establish the 'can,' and the discussion leads to the importance of the third premise of the practical proof.[8]

(2) According to the second concept of the highest good, one reflects in a cool hour what the world at large would be like if a "wise and all-powerful distributor" (*CprR* 5:128.14) could dispense happiness in exact proportion to people's virtue. Under this ideal perspective, one ought to bring about the highest good in its full meaning, i. e., an outcome that includes virtue and happiness. What does the addition of the second premise, 'ought implies can,' add to these considerations? The application of the principle is also different from the gallows example. While in that example one gets a psychological sense that one can refuse to give false testimony, one does not gain a psychological sense that one can do something under the ideal perspective of the highest good. Rather, one realizes that this God's-eye perspective is not one's situation, and that one cannot do it. Here too, 'ought implies can' is not an a priori axiom from which one can deduce results. Human beings are not all-powerful and wise, and the application of the principle merely points to the third premise: that it would need God in order to bring about the highest good.

To sum up the discussion about the second premise: 'ought implies can' is not an a priori axiom whereby one can conclude from a moral demand that it is in fact possible to bring about an outcome in the world. In some applications it gives one a psychological sense that one can do something, but when it is applied to causing happiness in the world, one does not gain the sense that one can bring it about. Rather, one's deliberations lead to the third premise of the practical proof: It needs God to bring about the highest good.

3 The Need for God

The third premise of the practical proof states that it needs God in order that one can bring about the highest good. But if we analyze the premise more closely, we see that Kant limits the claim in three important respects: (1) He does not really claim that one has to assume the existence of God, only that it is *one way* in which the highest good could come about. (2) In addition, if one keeps the first two premises in mind, one sees that the argument would only establish a *hope*

---

8 For a fuller discussion of these points see Sensen (2021, 24–7).

in the existence of God, not that God actually exists, and (3) Kant's explicit aim to provide a *practical* proof further limits the status of his argument. I shall look at all three limitations Kant provides in turn.

(1) Kant himself qualifies the claim that it needs God in order to bring about the highest good. He says explicitly that "we have a *choice*" when it comes to "*the way*" (*CprR* 5:144.22–145.2; see Willaschek 2010, 191–2) in which we believe virtue will result in happiness. He grants that it could be nature, and laws of nature that bring about happiness in proportion to virtue. At first Kant had argued that "our reason finds it *impossible* [...] to conceive" that nature is so arranged as to bring about the highest good, and that in the end a "moral interest [...] turns the scale" (*CprR* 5:145.3–16) in favor of assuming the existence of God. As long as one believes that nature does not reward moral behavior, one chooses the "only way that is conducive to morality" (*CprR* 5:145.29–31). However, Kant then qualifies this claim even further. He says it is not actually impossible to conceive that nature will reward moral behavior, merely that it is harder to imagine (see *CprR* 5:145.5–28). This all weakens the third premise dramatically. Kant himself grants that one does not have to assume the third premise of the practical proof. It is merely one way of how happiness could come about.

(2) We have already seen a second way in which Kant qualifies the view that one must assume the existence of God. In examining the first two premises of the practical proof, Kant qualified his claims to a *hope* that one can bring about the highest good,[9] and he did not claim knowledge that one can. Kant assesses the strength of the arguments as giving "comforting hope, though not certitude" (*CprR* 5:123.28–9). This is so for both concepts of the highest good—whether one focuses on one's own good or the good of the world at large—as I shall elucidate now.

In the first conception of the highest good, one ought to strive for one's own virtue, and can then hope to achieve happiness. But even the striving for one's own virtue—Kant argues in the *Religion* (*Rel.* 6:44.15–45.15)—is only a matter of hope, and one needs to assume divine assistance to think that it is possible. So, even the first part of the highest good, one's own striving for virtue, needs the assumption of God. However, if one has a choice whether to assume God or nature as the cause of happiness in the world (see point [1] in this section), then it seems that Kant would need to grant a choice here as well. The existence of God is one way to think how one could acquire virtue, but there could be other ways, and it is up to one's choice which way one assumes. One might find the existence of God to be the more likely way, but it is possible, for instance, to think that nature has set oneself

---

9 On Kant's notion of hope see Willaschek (2010, 180–1) and Chignell (2014).

up to have a change of heart at a certain age, e.g., by limiting the strength of the inclinations that oppose the moral disposition. The striving for virtue does not give certitude of God's existence, only a possible hope (see again *CprR* 5:123.28–9).

In the second conception of the highest good, one reflects from a God's-eye perspective what a world at large would be like if one could bring about happiness in proportion to realized virtue. The crucial point in this regard is that *this is not one's actual situation.* One is not all-powerful, wise, and beneficent. Therefore, one would have to assume the existence of God in order to bring about the happiness portion of the highest good: "only from a will that is morally perfect (holy and beneficent) and at the same time all-powerful, and so through harmony with this will, can we hope to attain the highest good" (*CprR* 5:129.23–7). But Kant does not conclude that one *knows* the existence of God with certitude, but merely that one must *hope* that one will achieve happiness: "happiness, cannot be attained at all in this world (so far as our own capacity is concerned) and is therefore made solely an object of hope" (*CprR* 5:129.5–6). In the happiness of the world at large "*my own happiness* is included" (*CprR* 5:130.1). On Kant's account, God is needed to achieve virtue and happiness, i.e., both parts of the highest good, but Kant does not conclude that God exists, but merely that one *hopes* for God's existence.[10]

In sum: Kant himself qualifies the third premise of the practical proof, and thereby the proof itself. First, he does not argue that one must assume the existence of God for the highest good to be possible. It is merely one way in which one can conceive of this possibility. Second, Kant does not argue that one knows the existence of God, but merely that one is entitled to hope for it. This affects the conclusion of the practical proof, in that 'God exists' is one solution for which one can hope. Kant qualifies the proof in a third way in that he explicitly wants to offer a *practical* proof. What is a practical proof?

4 Practical Proofs

There are at least three different conceptions of a practical proof that Kant might have in mind for the practical proof of God's existence:

(1) A practical proof might be a prove that starts with a *practical* proposition, e.g., the command to bring about the highest good, but whose aim is to establish a *theoretical* proposition, e.g., 'God exists.' From a command to do something, one would reach new knowledge about the world (see *CPR* A 806/B 834).

---

10 Strictly speaking, "all *hope* concerns happiness" (*CPR* A 805/B 834), and the hope for God's existence grows out of that initial hope.

(2) Another conception of practical proof is if one can proof something by doing it. For instance, one can proof that pure reason can determine the will by adopting a certain maxim. If in the gallows example the prince demands to give false testimony and all of one's inclinations speak in favor of that option, but pure reason tells one not to do so, one can prove that pure reason can determine the will independently of desires by choosing not to give false testimony (see Willaschek 1992, 185–8).[11]

(3) A third conception of a practical proof does not aim to establish a theoretical proposition, or the possession of an ability, but is put forward merely to prove something for one's practice. For instance, if one should do something, but it does not seem possible, a practical proof in the third sense would try to establish that the action is not necessarily impossible. Thereby the proof removes a theoretical belief that is a hindrance to one's action. An example of this kind of proof is Kant's claim that if freedom were to contradict natural necessity, freedom would have to be given up (see *GMM* 4:456.9–11). A practical proof does not establish the reality of freedom as a theoretical proposition or ability, nor the actual possibility of freedom (see *CPR* A 558/B 586). However, by showing that freedom does not necessarily contradict natural causation, one is then justified to act as if one is free (see *GMM* 4:448.4–9).

Which conception of practical proof does Kant employ in the practical proof for the existence of God? I shall argue that Kant does not put forth the first conception of a practical proof (similarly Ameriks 2012, 257). He does not see the practical proof as a demonstration of the theoretical knowledge of God's existence. But the point of the practical proof is also not to demonstrate the possession of an ability—as in the second conception of a practical proof. Rather Kant goes to great length to emphasize the third conception of a practical proof. He stresses that the practical proof is *not* "for speculative purposes" (*CprR* 5:136.7), and that it does not yield theoretical "cognitions" (*CprR* 5:135.3). Its "use is, instead, limited solely to the practice of the moral law" (*CprR* 5:137.31–2), or to "determine [...] the maxims of our rational conduct" (*CprR* 5:108.13–4).

In other words: The practical proof justifies one in acting in accordance with the categorical imperative. It does so by supporting the "possibility of *making real the necessary object* of pure practical reason (the highest good)" (*CprR* 5:135.28–9). The practical proof gives "a condition of the possibility of the object of a will determined by that law" (*CprR* 5:133.19–20). It shows a way in which the result of acting morally, the highest good, can be possible. As such, it supports that one can act for the sake of the categorical imperative in that the imperative does not (neces-

---

11 I thank Patricia Kitcher for pointing out this possibility to me.

sarily) give false promises. To be sure, the practical proof leads to some theoretical cognition. For, it now says what God would be like. It "determines the concept of the original being as the *supreme being*" (*CprR* 5:140.7–10, see *CprR* 5:134.17–27). One now knows that if there is a supreme being, it must be "*omniscient* [...], *omnipotent* [...], and so *omnipresent, eternal* and so forth*" (*CprR* 5:140.4–7, see *CPR* A 815/B 843) in order to be able to bring about the highest good. These are specifications that "the whole speculative course of reason could not effect" (*CprR* 5:140.11). In this sense the practical proof extends our theoretical knowledge of what God would be like. However, it does not establish the existence of God, but the practical proof only supports our acting in a moral way.

5 Context and Conclusion

This third limitation—that Kant offers the practical proof not as theoretical knowledge that God exists—is further confirmed if one looks at the context in which the practical proof appears. Kant presents the proof in the "Dialectic" of the *Critique of Practical Reason.* The "Dialectic" examines an antinomy or (seeming) contradiction that one's reason runs into if one applies reason's own basic principle. The basic principle is one whereby reason seeks the unconditioned for everything conditioned (see *CprR* 5:108.7–9, *CPR* A 409/B 436). This principle and its problems are the same for theoretical and practical reason: "Pure reason always has its dialectic" (*CprR* 5:107.6). In his theoretical philosophy, Kant seeks the unconditioned in "*antecendentia*" (*CPR* A 411/B 438). If, for instance, one wants to give a full causal explanation of a single event, one would have to list the totality of all *past* factors that contributed to the event, leading back to the beginning of the world. In practical philosophy, reason also looks at a totality, but not of the prior conditions, but of the *future* consequences of an action. In a cool hour of reflection, one thinks about the results of morally good behavior (see Section 1, point [2] above).[12]

Reason creates a dialectic in practical philosophy, because on the one hand one has a "need of pure reason" (*CprR* 5:142.4) to think that the highest good is possible, but on the other hand "no necessary connection of happiness with virtue in the world, adequate to the highest good, can be expected" (*CprR* 5:113.34–114.1). Virtue and natural happiness are "quite *different elements*" (*CprR* 5:112.36), and one cannot expect that one will lead to the other. Therefore, the most likely way to resolve the antinomy is to postulate the existence of God. A postulate is not a theo-

---

12 For further similarities and differences between the "Dialectics" in the first two *Critiques* see Sala (2004, 234–43), Watkins (2010), and Sensen (2023, 179–80).

retical insight, but "a *theoretical* proposition, though one not demonstrable as such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid *practical* law" (*CprR* 5:122.23–5). Contemplating the practical law in a cool hour of reflection, one thinks of the highest good as something one can love about acting morally. One does not expect that this will come about naturally—experience does not show that morally good people are rewarded—and so one postulates the existence of God as something that could bring about the right result. This is not just a desire, but a need of reason, and Kant argues that the "assumption is as necessary as the moral law itself" (*CprR* 5:144.37–8).

This latter claim, I have argued, is too strong. Even if one could not hope for the highest good to be realized, the categorical imperative would still be justified, and one still would have an incentive to follow it. Kant admits as much: "Here again, then, everything remains disinterested and grounded only on duty, and there is no need to base it on incentives of fear and hope, which if they became principles would destroy the whole worth of moral actions." (*CprR* 5:129.27–30) The claim is not that the impossibility of the highest good would invalidate the categorical imperative. One still could and should act morally. It is just that in a cool hour of reflection one might be demoralized:

Imagine that you live under an unjust regime. You oppose the regime for moral reasons, but you see a judge sentencing innocent people, while he lives in prosperity. Maybe he sentences members of your family and seizes your property. Finally, the unjust regime is toppled, but the judge is kept on in order to secure the functioning of the new state. Do you not have to hope that at some point justice will be done, and if you do not have indication that it will happen by natural laws, that there might be a God who can reward virtue with happiness? This, I take it, is the point Kant has in mind. The practical proof does not promise anything, it does not give certitude, but it justifies the victim in hoping for the results of moral conduct that one can love.

In conclusion: The Kant literature is skeptical that the practical proof establishes the existence of God. In this chapter, I have argued that Kant himself limits the claims of the proof in important respects. Kant wants to show *a* way in which —in a cool hour of reflection—one could hope for a consequence of moral conduct that would not demoralize but make possible results that—by a need of reason— one can love.

References

Ameriks, Karl, *Kant's Elliptical Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Bader, Ralf, "Kant's Theory of the Highest Good," in *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, ed. by Joachim Aufderheide and Ralf Bader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 183–213.

Beck, Lewis White, *A Commentary on Kant's* Critique of Practical Reason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

Butler, Joseph, "Sermon XI," in *The Works of Bishop Butler*, ed. by David White (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 110–18.

Chignell, Andrew, "Rational Hope, Possibility, and Divine Action," in *Kant's* Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. *A Critical Guide*, ed. by Gordon Michaelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 98–117.

DiCenso, James, *Kant, Religion, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Engstrom, Stephen, "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (1992), 747–80.

Fugate, Courtney D., "The Highest Good and Kant's Proof(s) of God's Existence," *History of Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (2014), 137–58.

Guyer, Paul, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Kleingeld, Pauline, "Kant on 'Good', the Good, and the Duty to Promote the Highest Good," in *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Thomas Höwing (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 33–50.

Pasternack, Lawrence, *Kant on Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (London: Routledge, 2014).

Reath, Andrews, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988), 593–619.

Rödl, Sebastian, "Why Ought Implies Can," in *Kant on Practical Justification*, ed. by Mark Timmons and Sorin Baiasu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42–56.

Sala, Giovanni B., *Kants* Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. *Ein Kommentar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004).

Sensen, Oliver, "The Supreme Principle of Morality," in *Kant as Lecturer*, ed. by Robert Clewis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 179–99.

Sensen, Oliver, "Kant on Individual Moral Progress," in *The Possibility of Progress*, ed. by Paul Wilford and Sam Stoner (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 19–29.

Sensen, Oliver, "The 'Dialectic' of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*," in *Kantian Minds*, ed. by Sorin Baiasu and Mark Timmons (London: Routledge, 2023), 178–88.

Silber, John, "The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant's Ethics," *Ethics* 73 (1963), 179–97.

Sussman, David, "The Highest Good: Who Needs it?," in *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, ed. by Joachim Aufderheide and Ralf Bader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 214–28.

Watkins, Eric, "The Antinomy of Practical Reason: Reason, the Unconditioned and the Highest Good," in *Kant's* Critique of Practical Reason. *A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145–67.

Willaschek, Marcus, *Praktische Vernunft* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992).

Willaschek, Marcus, "The Primacy of Practical Reason and the Idea of a Practical Postulate," in *Kant's* Critique of Practical Reason. *A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168–96.

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

Lara Ostaric

Kant's Moral Proof of the Existence of God in the Third *Critique*

There are two main approaches in the recent secondary literature to the proof of God's existence offered by Kant in the third *Critique.* According to one approach, Kant criticizes natural theology in light of the validity of his moral proof, which he already demonstrated in the second *Critique* and reaffirms again in the third *Critique.*[1] According to the other view, Kant's proof of God's existence in the third *Critique* is not a mere reaffirmation of the validity of the moral proof he offered earlier. Instead, the proof of God's existence in the third *Critique* takes a new form, namely, the one which presupposes a mutual reinforcement of natural and moral theology. On this view, natural theology has a much more important role to play in Kant's proof of God's existence than has been argued thus far in the secondary literature. This is because the physico-theological proof and the moral theological proof are "two proofs,"[2] each addressing a different aspect of the idea of God in Kant's third *Critique:* the former addresses the theoretical (God as a thinking being) and the latter the practical aspect (God as an acting being). The theoretical aspects of God's consciousness are represented by the idea of God as the creator of the unity of natural laws and the practical aspects of God's consciousness are represented by the idea of the creator of the unity of nature and moral laws.[3] While the first approach does not even entertain a possibility for a positive role of the physico-theological proof in Kant's efforts to readdress the problem of God's existence, the latter approach does not sufficiently emphasize Kant's criticism of the same proof.

---

1 See Karl Ameriks (2012). Ameriks contends that Kant's reference to the proof of 'natural theology' as *Scheinbeweis* serves as a reminder that "as a critique, *CPJ's* entire appendix can be read primarily as an attack on the whole tradition of natural theology insofar as this discipline purports to be both truly about God and able to succeed independently of moral theology" (Ameriks 2012, 240). Ameriks does not consider that Kant's account of reflective judgment is his attempt to critically incorporate traditional 'natural theology' into his moral proof. Ameriks understands Kant's contention that "practical reflective judging" can "claim to convince sufficiently from a practical point of view" (*CPJ* 5:463.9) as a reflection on necessities 'external' to the moral law itself. In other words, these are reflections on the common experience of the world as not corresponding in and of itself to the demands of morality. These kinds of 'external' reflections, as I will argue, are already present in the second *Critique* and are not new and unique to the third *Critique.*
2 This position is defended by Ina Goy (2017, 280).
3 See Goy (2017, 280, 260).

In this essay, I shall argue for a middle position. Unlike the first approach, I shall argue that Kant's approach to natural theology is not merely negative and critical. He does not merely reject the validity of the physico-theological proof in light of his moral proof. Instead, he offers his own "critical" version of the physico-theological proof with the intention of reinforcing his moral proof. On the above-described second approach, Kant's reliance on natural theology must either forgo Kant's criticism of the false inference of the natural theologist (from empirical observations to the claim of existence of a non-empirical entity), or it must take the mere thought of a mind more powerful than ours (to which we are led by the idea of a 'natural end') as proof of God's existence. While the former is clearly dogmatic, it is not clear why the latter, namely, a mere idea or a thought of a divine designer should count as *proof* of the existence of its object. Thus, unlike the second approach, I more strongly emphasize that for Kant any incorporation of the physico-theological proof into his moral proof requires a close scrutiny of the former by Kant's critical philosophy. In the third *Critique*, Kant refers to reflective judgment as offering a "proof [...] κατ' ανθρωπον [according to a human being]" (*CPJ* 5:463.1–2). I shall argue that this claim is decisive for understanding Kant's "critical" incorporation of natural theology into his moral proof. Kant's "critical" incorporation of the physico-theological proof is not motivated by an attempt to offer a proof of two separate aspects of God's consciousness, namely, theoretical and practical. Instead, it is motivated by his concern for the unity of theoretical and practical reason. I shall argue that for Kant it is not sufficient that a transcendental philosopher merely "conceive" that there is God from the perspective of the truth of the moral law but also, given the work of reflective judgment and its representation of the natural world as a rationally organized whole, she must be able to "perceive" it in nature.[4] That which practical reason demands that we *conceive* as possible (the progress towards the realization of the final end of creation, the highest good) *receives its object* from reflective judgment in response to the needs of theoretical reason.

I shall proceed as follows. In Section one, I summarize Kant's argument for the highest good in the third *Critique.* According to some commentators, Kant's conception of the highest good in the third *Critique* is immanent. The immanent status of

---

4 For Kant, 'perception' is a sensation of which we are conscious (see *CPR* A 120) and which he relates to the actuality of things (see *CPR* A 225/B 272 and *CPR* A 374–5). In the essay, I am clearly using Kant's conception of perception in a modified sense. My intention is not to claim that either the final end of creation or God are entities given as appearances for us to be perceived. The point of contrast between 'intellectually conceiving' vs. 'perceiving', as I continue to show below, is to emphasize that Kant's aim is to argue that these Ideas receive reality even though this reality is merely the one "sufficient for the reflecting power of judgment" (*CPJ* 5:479.14–15).

the highest good however removes for Kant any need for God's existence. In contrast to these commentators, I argue that the highest good in the third *Critique* remains partially transcendent which explains Kant's continued need for a moral proof and why I contend in Section two that his moral proof in the third *Critique* remains mostly unchanged when compared to the one he offered in the second *Critique.* In Section three, I provide an overview of the history of Kant's approach to the physico-theological argument. Section four addresses the complementary relation of the physico-theological and moral argument for God's existence in the third *Critique.* Section five focuses on the role of reflective judgment in Kant's "critical" incorporation of the physico-theological proof to the moral proof of God's existence. I end the essay with a brief conclusion in Section six.

1 The Highest Good and the Ethical Community

As in the second *Critique*, in the third *Critique* the highest good for Kant consists of two aspects: the unconditioned part (morality) and the conditioned part (happiness):

> The subjective condition under which the human being (and, according to our concepts, every rational finite being as well) can set a final end for itself under the above law is happiness. Hence the highest physical good that is possible in the world and which can be promoted, as far as it is up to us, as a final end, is *happiness*—under the objective condition of the concordance of humans with the law of *morality*, as the worthiness to be happy. (*CPJ* 5:450.10–16)

The meaning of the two constitutive aspects of the highest good, namely, the concordance of human beings with the law of morality and their happiness, is best understood within the context of Kant's discussion of ends that are also duties in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). Our duty to promote the highest good consists in our duty to promote one's own moral perfection, "a duty to carry the cultivation of his will up to the purest virtuous disposition" (*MM* 6:387.12–13). In other words, we have a duty to improve our virtuous disposition and approximate, albeit infinitely, the state in which we would act from duty and out of good will alone. While the unconditioned aspect of the highest good consists in the promotion of one's own moral perfection, the conditioned aspect of the highest good consists in the "greatest good for rational beings in the world," namely, "universal happiness" (*CPJ* 5:453.17–19). One aspect of this "universal happiness" is what Kant in *Religion* calls "moral happiness" (*Rel.* 6:67.20), that is, the realization of moral ends. This conception of happiness would be universal because ends that are moral are also universal.

Still, one might wonder how Kant's conception of happiness as "the highest possible *physical* good in the world" (*CPJ* 5:450.14, my emphasis), which is associated with the claims of one's self-love, can amount to a "universal happiness" as constitutive of the highest good. The answer to this question is found in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, where Kant contends that we have a duty to promote "the happiness of *other* human beings, *whose* (permitted) *end I thus* make *my own end as well*" (*MM* 6:388.6–8). Thus, we have a duty to further the happiness of other human beings as long as their ends, directed towards the achievement of happiness, are morally permissible. The duty of beneficence is derived from subjecting one's own self-love to the moral law:

> The reason that it is a duty to be beneficent is this: since our self-love cannot be separated from our need to be loved (helped in case of need) by others as well, we therefore make ourselves an end for others; and the only way this maxim can be binding is through its qualification as a universal law, hence through our will to make others our ends as well. The happiness of others is therefore an end that is also a duty. (*MM* 6:393.16–23)[5]

Thus the conception of happiness as the "greatest physical good," one's own well-being, can lead to "universal happiness" because it presupposes a community of virtuous individuals that always have the other person's happiness as their own end.

This conception of the highest good is consistent with Kant's conception of the highest good in the second *Critique*, namely, the highest good as the realization of the ends of virtuous individuals. This is because a community of individuals possessing wills that are selfless and directed toward the happiness of others and not toward the ends of one's self-love will ensure that the ends of virtuous individuals be realized. The only difference is that in the third *Critique* the realization of the ends of virtuous individuals is an object of a collective effort.[6] The fact that in

---

5 This point is also made by Stephen Engstrom (1992, 760–1).

6 For Kant, the fact that the promotion of the happiness of others is conducive to the realization of the ends of individuals with a virtuous disposition does not entail that those ends must entirely be moral ends. Virtuous individuals with a selfless will also have their own personal happiness as their end. This happiness however must be consistent with the moral law and it therefore presupposes only the ends of self-love that are morally permissible. In Part I of the 1793 essay *On the Common Saying: That May Be True in Theory, but It is of No Use in Practice*, where Kant replies to Christian Garve's criticism that Kant's categorical imperative could not provide a motive for action, Kant speaks of the pursuit of happiness that would be *consistent* with one's morality: "Thus it can by no means be said that I account to my happiness any state that I *prefer* to be in than any other kind. For I must first be sure that I am not acting against my duty; only afterwards am I permitted to look around for happiness, to the extent that I can unite the state of being happy with that morally (not naturally) good state of mine" (*TP* 8:283.13–19). Here happiness is understood as the pursuit of

the third *Critique* Kant departs from his earlier conception of the highest good and, instead, argues that the highest good must be the object of a collective striving is evident from his claim that the idea of the highest good presupposes "the human being [as such] under moral laws" (*CPJ* 5:445.18, *CPJ* 5:449.15).[7] By "human being" (*der Mensch*) Kant does not understand an individual human being but "each rational being in the world" (*CPJ* 5:448.33), or humankind as a whole.

> However, even mutual effort can never be sufficient to reach the ethical community that will be in *complete* conformity to the moral law.[8] In other words, the realization of the ends of the good will in the world presupposes the cooperation of *external* nature (including other members of the community) with the will of an individual with a virtuous disposition and it requires the constancy of one's moral disposition, that is, the cooperation of one's *internal* nature with the good will or the moral law. This assurance of the cooperation of external and internal nature with the good will can come only with the assumption of the existence of a perfectly moral being that assists our ethical community and our own individual efforts to maintain this constancy.[9]

ends conducive to one's well-being insofar as those ends are morally permissible. In the following passage in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant states clearly the fact that the duty to promote the happiness of others does not exclude one's own personal happiness: "For a maxim of promoting others' happiness at the sacrifice of one's own happiness, one's true needs, would conflict with itself if it were made a universal law. Hence, this duty is only a *wide* one; the duty has in it a latitude for doing more or less, and no specific limits can be assigned to what should be done" (*MM* 6:393.29–34). If the ends of a virtuous individual were merely moral ends, then the duty to further those ends would entail that happiness consists in the mere awareness and satisfaction of the moral ends being realized in nature. While this may be a part of Kant's overall conception of happiness it does not exhaust it. The claims of self-love that are made consistent with the moral law are also a part of happiness.

7 The communal aspect of the highest good is also emphasized in the essay *On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but It is of No Use in Practice* (1793) and in *Religion* (1793), see *TP* 8:270.29 and *Rel.* 6:97.21–4, respectively.

8 Kant continues to claim that in the later writings that follow the publication of the third *Critique*, see *Rel.* 6:66 and *Progress* 20:294.

9 Other commentators have argued that Kant's conception of the highest good in his later works is immanent and not transcendent. Eckart Förster (1998, 353) contends that "moral happiness" in Kant's later works is achievable by the subject itself. I argue above that Kant's conception of the highest good in the third *Critique* and after (for example, in his *Religion*) requires an assurance of the constancy of our moral disposition that continues to advance in goodness.

2 Kant's Moral Proof of God's Existence in the Third *Critique*

Given the partially transcendent nature of the highest good in the third *Critique* (and after), Kant's moral proof for God's existence in the third *Critique* is straight-forward and identical to the one he provides in the second *Critique:*

> [G]iven all of the capacities of our reason, it is impossible for us to represent these two re-quirements of the final end that is set for us by the moral law as both *connected* by merely natural causes and adequate to the idea of the final end as so conceived. Thus the concept of the practical necessity of such an end, by means of the application of our own powers, is not congruent with the theoretical concept of the physical possibility of producing it if we do not connect our freedom with any other causality (as a means) than that of nature. Consequently, we must assume a moral cause of the world in order to set before ourselves a final end, in accordance with the moral law; and insofar as this final end is necessary, to that extent (i. e., in the same degree and for the same reason) is it also necessary to assume the former, name-ly, that there is God. (*CPJ* 5:450.17–30)

Thus, just as in the second *Critique*, Kant reminds us that given the two heteroge-nous elements of the highest good, morality and happiness, nature considered as mechanism cannot account for their necessary connection. Regardless of whether we conceive of happiness as "moral happiness" (i. e., the success in realization of the moral ends and the constancy of our moral disposition) or as "physical happi-ness" (i. e., one's well-being proportionally distributed with one's worthiness of it), there will always remain a gap for us between, on the one hand, the "practical ne-cessity" of striving after the final end and, on the other, the empirical obstacles that we have as practical agents in the world. The fact is that this practical neces-sity, as Kant states in the passage above, "is not congruent with the theoretical con-cept of the physical possibility of producing" the highest good in the world. There-fore, we are justified, in light of the truth of the moral law, in assuming God's existence as a being that would make external and internal nature cooperative with the final ends of our reason.

One must ask then, what does the third *Critique* offer that is new and an im-provement of the moral proof Kant already provided in the second *Critique.* One may argue that Kant's aim in the third *Critique* is to criticize natural theology and reaffirm the conclusions of the second *Critique*, the view that only via practi-cal reason we can have knowledge of God's existence.[10] However, Kant's argument, as I will show below, is that natural and moral theology can have a complementary

---

10 This is the view defended by Ameriks (2012, 240).

and mutually reinforcing relation once the former is set upon the proper critical path.

Kant contends that the idea of the highest good "in the use of freedom in accordance with moral laws [...] has subjectively *practical* reality" (*CPJ* 5:453.14–16). But "[f]or the objective theoretical reality of the concept of the final end of rational beings in the world it is thus requisite not merely that we have a final end that is set before us *a priori*, but also that the existence of creation, i.e., the world itself, has a final end [...]" (*CPJ* 5:45.26–30). What should one make of Kant's contrast between the highest good's "subjective practical" as opposed to its "objective theoretical reality"? By the former Kant understands that the highest good is the necessary object for *us*, the necessary object of practical reason. By the latter, that the highest good is the final end of nature, *the world.* But are we not rationally justified in inferring the latter from the former? Is the moral proof of God's existence not our way of inferring that the world must have a final end?

> Now in virtue of the moral law, which imposes this final end upon us, we have a basis for assuming, from a practical point of view, that is, in order to apply our powers to realize it, its possibility, its realizability, hence also a nature of things corresponding to that end [...]. Thus we have a moral ground for also conceiving of a final end of creation for a world (*CPJ* 5:455.5–12).[11]

In the second *Critique*, the moral ground for the postulate of God's existence entails realism because it presupposes necessity of a normative and not merely prudential hypothetical sort relative to some contingent ends.[12] We could also say that positing that the world must have a final end on moral grounds is sufficient to free the concept of the highest good from the fetters of subjectivism because our claim that the world has a final end must be true. However, it is necessarily true on moral grounds, "from a practical point of view." For Kant, however, it does not seem to be sufficient to "conceive" (*CPJ* 5:455.12) of the final end of creation on moral grounds. We also need to be able to *perceive* the final end of creation. In other words, it is not sufficient to *intellectually* conceive the "practical reality" of the idea of God and the final end of creation. Instead, the object of the idea of the final end of creation must be given by *sensibility* and, thus, it must receive assistance from the "reality that it [God's existence and the final end of creation]

---

11 Kant's notion of the "final end of creation" originates in eighteenth-century metaphysical teleology. More specifically, it has its origin in Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (see Baumgarten 1757, §948).
12 This view has been argued by Ameriks (2012, 250). I refer to this view as "rational necessitation realism" [RNR] and have discussed it and endorsed it in ch. 2 of my book *The* Critique of Judgment *and the Unity of Kant's Critical System* (2023) and Ostaric (2017).

already has for the power of judgment from a theoretical point of view" (*CPJ* 5:456.21–2).

This claim appears problematic on a couple of grounds: (1) it seems that the moral proof of God's existence by itself does not offer sufficient certainty after all, and (2) the need for assistance from the power of judgment from a "theoretical point of view" may be suggestive of some need for a dogmatic theoretical proof of God's existence. However, in what follows we will see that neither of the above stated concerns are legitimate worries for Kant's view. But in order to show this and to answer the question of why and to what extent the assistance from theoretical reason is necessary for the needs of practical reason we need to examine the relation between physical and moral teleology in the third *Critique.*

3 Kant's Ambivalent View of the Physico-theological Proof of God's Existence

Already in his pre-critical writings, Kant expressed his positive views of the physico-theological proof. In *The Only Possible Ground of Proof in Support of a Demonstration of God's Existence* (1763), Kant compares the ontological proof for God's existence to the physico-theological proof and argues that, while the ontological proof is the only valid proof for God's existence given its "logical precision and completeness," the physico-theological proof should be praised for its "accessibility for the understanding, liveliness of expression, beauty and capacity to move the moral motivation of human nature" (*GP* 2:161.9–12). In the first *Critique*, he contends that

> [t]his proof always deserves to be named with respect. It is the oldest, clearest and the most appropriate to common human reason. It enlivens the study of nature, just as it gets its existence through this study and through it receives ever renewed force. It brings in ends and aims where they would not have been discovered by our observation itself and extends our information about nature through a guiding thread of a particular unity whose principle is outside of nature. (*CPR* A 623/B 651)

Thus, according to Kant, the physico-theological proof is valuable for both morality and the empirical science of nature.[13]

In spite of the benefits of the argument from design for both morality and the theoretical exploration of nature, Kant rejects its validity. In the first *Critique*, he refutes the validity of the ontological proof by arguing that existence is not a real

---

13 See his sympathetic views towards the physico-theological proof expressed in Part One, Section Three of his lectures on philosophical theology (Wood 1978, 107).

predicate that could add to the concept of a thing and that every existential proposition is synthetic, so that in the proposition 'God is omnipotent' 'is' is not a predicate but that which posits the relation between the predicate and the subject. He refutes the validity of both the cosmological and the physico-theological proof by arguing that they ultimately depend on the validity of the ontological proof. More precisely, for Kant, the physico-theological proof is an inference to God's existence from "a determinate experience, that of the things in the present world, their constitution and order" (*CPR* A 620/B 649). The physico-theological proof argues from the constitution of the objects of nature given in experience, their beauty and purposive organization, to the existence of a rational and a wise designer of this natural order. Kant's first objection to the physico-theological proof is its inference from the conditioned to the unconditioned:

> For how can any experience be given that is adequate to an idea? For what is special about an idea is that no experience can ever be congruent to it. The transcendental idea of a necessary all-sufficient original being is so overwhelmingly great, so sublimely high above everything empirical, which is at all times conditioned, that partly one can never even procure enough material in experience to fill such a concept, and partly if one searches for the unconditioned among conditioned things, then one will seek forever and always in vain, since no law of any empirical synthesis will ever give an example of such a thing, or even the least guidance in looking for it. (*CPR* A 621/B 649)

Kant contends that the supremely real (necessary, all-sufficient, and original) being (*ens realissimum*) is an idea of reason and no experience can be adequate to it. This is the reason why the inference of a physical theologist leaves God's nature indeterminate and why the physico-theological proof is not sufficient for theology. The natural theologist abandons the empirical grounds and helps himself with the cosmological proof arguing from the contingency of natural order to the idea of an absolutely necessary being which, as the most real being (*ens realissimum*), must also exist. Thus, the natural theologist "must always leave it up to the ontological proof (to which it serves only as an introduction) in order to supplement [*ergänzen*] this lack" (*CPR* A 625/B 653).[14]

    With exposure to Hume's *Dialogues*, which were not available to him in 1781, Kant refines his objections to the physico-theological argument in the third *Cri-*

---

14 I modified the Cambridge translation here as well as in my citations from the Appendix to the Methodology of the Teleological Power of Judgment that follow below. The Cambridge translation uses the phrase "makes good" for both *ersetzen* and *ergänzen* which blurs the distinction between on the one hand "completing" or "supplementing" and on the other "replacing" the physico-theological proof.

tique.[15] He contends that attributing any form of perfection to the world-author from the observation of the empirical nature that is imperfect and limited assumes our own omniscience.[16] This is because the view presupposes that God's perfect and immaterial nature is the object of our knowledge in the same way as the objects of experience are. Without being able to infer a more determinate concept of a deity, we are also not justified in inferring a single intelligent being.[17]

Because physical theology cannot determine anything about God's existence and the nature of God's being, Kant contends in the third *Critique* that physico-theology is a "misunderstood physical teleology" (*CPJ* 5:442.6). In other words, it can "certainly justify the concept of an intelligent world-cause, as a merely subjectively appropriate concept for the constitution of our cognitive faculty of the possibility of the things that we make intelligible to ourselves in accordance with ends" (*CPJ* 5:437.20–4). This is because we introduce this concept for the purposes of our reflection on nature relative to the needs of our limited cognitive capacities. But it will always remain a natural (physical) teleology, not a theology, "because the relation to ends in it always can and must be considered only as conditioned within nature" (*CPJ* 5:437.27–8). Put differently, natural theology will always remain natural teleology because it does not have the resources to answer the question of the final end of creation. The latter can only be answered by pure reason a priori with respect to that which is "absolutely good," or an unconditioned object of pure practical reason, which justifies the assumption of not only a perfect intelligence but also a perfect moral being that created the world with the final ends of reason in mind. Only via the moral law and the concept of the highest good as the unconditioned end of pure practical reason can we determine the idea of God and ascribe to Him the traditional attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence and justice (i. e., wisdom), eternity, omnipresence.

The role that the ontological argument played in the first *Critique* with respect to physical theology, or the argument from design, is in the third *Critique* played by moral teleology. That is to say, only with moral teleology can we have a complete determination of the divine being and therefore a theology: "In this way *moral* tele-

---

15 Hume's *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion* did not appear in German until 1781, the year of the publication of the first *Critique*. Kant, therefore, could not have had the advantage of Hume's *Dialogues* while arguing in the first *Critique* that we cannot use the empirical argument to infer the perfect intelligence of the cause of nature.

16 See *CPJ* 5:480–1. This is the objection Demea advances to Cleanthes in Part 2 of the *Dialogues* (Hume 2007, 26).

17 See *CPJ* 5:480–1 and Hume's *Dialogues*, Part 5 where Philo objects to Cleanthes that the inference from empirical effects to a cause does not exclude the possibility of more than one designer (Hume 2007, 43–4).

ology supplements [*ergänzt*] the defect of *physical* teleology, and first establishes a *theology*" (*CPJ* 5:444.28–9).

To be sure, in the third *Critique*, Kant contends that even were nature to give "no clear trace of organization but [to reveal] only effects of mere mechanism of raw matter" (*CPJ* 5:478.33) we "would still find in the concept of freedom and the moral ideas that are grounded upon that a practically sufficient ground for postulating the concept of an original being in accordance with these" (*CPJ* 5:479.2–5). The sufficiency of the moral proof and the illegitimate inferences of the physico-theological proof explain Kant's remark that the moral proof "does not properly merely supplement [*ergänzt*] the physico-teleological proof, thereby making it into a complete proof; rather it is a special proof that replaces [*ersetzt*] the lack of conviction in the latter" (*CPJ* 5:478.13–16). The question one must raise therefore is the following: if moral teleology is clearly sufficient for a theology, why is there a need to reintroduce physical teleology in the third *Critique* and suggest at places that the former merely "supplements" (*ergänzt*) the latter?

4 The Complementary Relation of Physical and Moral Teleology

One can rightfully criticize Kant for wavering between, on the one hand, the merely supplementary role of moral teleology in relation to physical teleology and, on the other, its role of replacing physical teleology all together.[18] One can, however, provide a more charitable reading according to which this inconsistency is merely apparent. I will argue that at places Kant is inclined to take a less radical position, and claim that moral teleology merely "supplements" physical teleology, because of Kant's continued view that physical teleology is valuable to the interests of both (1) theoretical and (2) practical reason.

The importance of physical teleology for theoretical reason, namely, for our cognition of nature, consists in the fact that we can only represent organic formations with the complementary use of mechanical and teleological causes. This further requires an assumption of a divine intelligence from which both principles "flow" (*abfließen*) (*CPJ* 5:412.25) and which, unlike our discursive intellect, does not recognize the distinction between the two. And it further justifies our representation of the whole of nature as an organized system where "everything in the world is good for something, that nothing in it is in vain" (*CPJ* 5:379.6). The representation of the world as an organized system has an encouraging effect on our

---

18 This criticism is advanced by Ina Goy in Goy (2017, 279).

theoretical exploration of nature and "by means of it we have been able to discover many laws of nature which, given the limitation of our insights into the inner mechanism of nature, would otherwise remain hidden from us" (*CPJ* 5:398.19–22). Put differently, physical teleology leads us to expect the unity in nature and is further helping us discover lawfulness (unity) that would otherwise go unnoticed by us.

Although physical teleology is necessary for our exploration and cognition of nature, it is not sufficient. Because physical teleology cannot answer the question of the final end of nature, our representation of nature cannot form a single system:

> What help is it, one may rightly complain, to ground all these arrangements on a great and for us immeasurable intelligence, and have it arrange this world in accordance with its intentions, if nature does not nor ever can tell us anything about the final aim, without which, however, we can form no common reference point for all these natural ends, no teleological principle sufficient for cognizing all the ends together in a single system. (*CPJ* 5:440.30–6)

According to Kant, we cannot have a proper science of nature unless we take reason to be the condition of the possibility of its representation, that is, unless we represent nature as a system of lawfully connected phenomena. This also means that nature as a representation of reason must have a final end. As a representation of reason the system of nature must culminate, or must have for its final end, an object of nature that is an end in itself, a human being as itself a rational, self-determining moral being. Thus, on Kant's view, moral teleology merely "supplements" physical teleology insofar as only with the idea of the final end of creation (a human being in her noumenal sense and her capacity to give the law to herself) and the conception of God as an intelligent *and* moral being can we have a proper science of nature.

Physical teleology is not merely necessary (albeit not sufficient) with respect to the needs of our theoretical reason, but it also assists the ends of practical reason. Kant contends that physical teleology is a "preparation (propaedeutic) for theology" (*CPJ* 5:442.7). Physical teleology, writes Kant,

> can [...] make us attentive to this [the idea of a supreme cause of nature] and thus more receptive to the moral proof. For that which is requisite for the latter concept is so essentially different from everything that concepts of nature can contain and teach that it needs a basis for proof and a proof that are entirely independent of the former in order to state the concept of an original being adequately for a theology and to infer to its existence. (*CPJ* 5:478.22–8)

The moral proof is grounded on the principle of freedom that belongs to the noumenal realm, the unconditioned, that is ontologically distinct from the phenomenal realm as conditioned nature. Physical teleology, at least on the psychological

level, helps us to perceive the gap as less significant, preparing us for the assent in the moral proof. To put it metaphorically, physical teleology or the appearance of nature as organized, sets us on a path to search for a question, the question of the final end of nature, to which moral teleology and the moral proof can serve as the only answer.

> [A] physical (properly physico-teleological) theology can at least serve as a propaedeutic to theology proper, since by means of the consideration of natural ends, for which it provides us with rich material, it suggests to us the idea of a final end, which nature cannot do; hence it certainly makes palpable the need for a theology that can adequately determine the concept of God for the highest practical use of reason. (*CPJ* 5:485.12–19)

The observation of a special purposive arrangement of organisms leads us to represent nature in its entirety as a system of ends. (*CPJ* 5:378.37–379.2) This is what "nature [considered as mechanism-LO] cannot do" (*CPJ* 5:485.16). Nature as a system of ends further suggests the idea of there being a final end, a human being in its noumenal sense. And in order to account for the final end, a human being as a moral and free being, we must transition from the thought of a mere intelligent designer to the idea of God as a creator and a moral author of the world. In this way, the appearance of nature's order serves as a *sign*, a nod from nature, that what we know must be the case from the practical point of view (because it is rationally necessitated by the truth of the moral law) may in fact be true theoretically. Thus, moral teleology "supplements" physical teleology insofar as it serves as a concluding answer to the question we are set upon to raise with the help of physical teleology.

There is, however, a third way in which moral and physical teleology stand in a complementary relation to each other. Although not explicitly stated by Kant in these terms, physical teleology supplements moral teleology. Put differently, the moral proof receives a further support from physical teleology because the physico-teleological conception of God "serves as the desired confirmation of the moral argument, insofar as nature is thus capable of displaying something analogous to the (moral) ideas of reason. For the concept of a supreme cause that has understanding *acquires reality* sufficient for the reflecting power of judgment" (*CPJ* 5:479.11–15; my emphasis).[19] To be sure, as we saw above, Kant is careful to emphasize that objective reality given to the idea of God via physical teleology does not

---

19 Kant is not sufficiently careful here when he contends that physical teleology "serves as the desired confirmation of the moral argument." This may suggest that he wishes to argue that physical teleology provides a theoretical proof for what we know must be the case from a "practical point of view." But Kant's aim is not to regress into dogmatism, as I will show below, and we can regard this expression as an unfortunate carelessness on his part.

undermine the sufficiency and power of the moral proof. It is in this context that Kant emphasizes that physical teleology "is not necessary to ground the moral proof" (*CPJ* 5:479.15) and, furthermore,

> nor does the latter [the moral proof] serve to supplement the former [the physico-teleological proof], which by itself does not refer to morality at all, in order to make it into a proof by means of an inference continued in accordance with a single principle. Two such dissimilar principles as nature and freedom can only yield two different kinds of proof, since the attempt to derive from the former what is to be proved will be found to be inadequate. (*CPJ* 5:479.16–21)

The physico-teleological proof and the moral proof are radically dissimilar since the former starts from the conditioned (i.e., the realm of nature) and the latter from the unconditioned (i.e., the realm of freedom) and only the latter can prove the existence of God and thereby the possibility of our progress towards the realization of the highest good *in the world.*

Physical teleology, however, assists the moral proof from the perspective of reason's demand for its own unity. Just as practical reason must cohere with the demands of theoretical reason so that the ends of practical reason serve as the necessary horizon for the successful exploration of nature (i.e., only under the condition of the final end can there be a complete system of nature), so also the representation of theoretical reason must cohere with the ends of practical reason. In representing nature as a purposive system reflective judgment creates a representation of the world as if it were a product of a rational design and therefore receptive to our rational ends. It is in this respect that Kant refers to physical teleology as "displaying something analogous to the (moral) ideas of reason" (*CPJ* 5:479.11–12). Kant's choice of the word "displaying" (*aufstellen*) suggests that the physico-teleological representation of nature as an organized system serves as an "analogue of [...] a schema" (*CPR* A 665/B 693)[20] for the moral ideas of reason insofar as it represents nature as amenable to the realization of the highest good. To be sure, this theoretical representation of nature is not constitutive but

---

20 'Schema' for Kant is a rule of synthesis of the imagination in accordance with a concept that has objective reality. See *CPR* A 137–47/B 176–87. In *CPJ*, Kant refers to "schemata" as "direct [...] presentations of the concept" in sensible intuition (*CPJ* 5:352.9–10). In "Appendix" to the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the first *Critique*, Kant refers to reason's principle of the systematic unity of nature as a schema analogue, an indirect and not a direct exhibition of the idea of God, "*as if* the sum total of all appearances (the world of sense itself) had a single supreme and all-sufficient ground outside its range, namely an independent, original, and creative reason" (*CPR* A 672/B 700). My contention is that in the third *Critique*, the role of providing an indirect, analogical exhibition of the idea of God is assigned to reflective judgment.

merely regulative and, therefore, has "the reality sufficient for the reflecting power of judgment" (*CPJ* 5:479.14–15) and not for the way nature is in itself.

In what follows, I will continue to explore the role of reflective judgment in providing a schema analogue for the idea of God and thereby reinforcing its objective reality.

5 The Role of Reflective Judgment in Grounding *Glaube*

In §90 titled "On the Kind of Holding to Be True Involved In a Teleological Proof of the Existence of God,"[21] Kant contends that "[t]he first thing that is required of any proof [...] is that it not *persuade* but rather *convince*, or at least have an effect on conviction" (*CPJ* 5:461.14–18). These opening lines of §90 and Kant's distinction between "persuasion" (*Überredung*) and "conviction" (*Überzeugung*) return the reader to his discussion of these terms in the "Canon" of the first *Critique.* "Persuasion," writes Kant, "is a mere semblance, since the ground of the judgment, which lies solely in the subject, is held to be objective. Hence, such a judgment only has private validity, and this taking something to be true cannot be communicated" (*CPR* A 821/B 848). Thus, persuasion is an assent to a proposition according to which a subject takes herself to be holding objective grounds for an assent (hence, it is subjectively sufficient) while either not even attempting to rationally justify her assent by citing some information about the constitution of the object that should serve as a ground for her assent, or if attempting to rationally justify her assent, then her process of justification involves an illegitimate inference. By contrast, "conviction" is an assent for which the judging subject takes herself to be holding objective grounds for her assent while also "hav[ing] reason" (*CPR* A 820/B 848) for what she holds, i.e., while also engaging in the process of legitimate rational justification, the process of citing some information about the constitution of the object that should serve as a ground for her assent. Unlike persuasion, conviction is inter-subjectively valid and communicable.

---

21 The Cambridge translation of the third *Critique* puts "moral" instead of "teleological," which gives the wrong impression that the main topic of §90 is Kant's moral proof of God's existence rather than his criticism of theoretical teleological proofs. Also, the Cambridge edition translates *Fürwahrhalten* as "affirmation" which hides the reference to 'truth' in this concept, suggesting an attitude that may not involve a rational justification and may be entirely speculative in nature. See Ameriks (2012, 238).

In §90 of the third *Critique*, Kant claims that reflective judgment provides a "proof" for *Glaube.* Given that reflective judgment in physical teleology can only produce a proof that leads to persuasion, the puzzle remains whether there is a special form of reflective judgement that offers a legitimate proof that leads to conviction.

> A proof, however, that aims at conviction can be in turn of two different kinds, either one that would determine what the object is *in itself* or else one that would determine what it is *for us* (human beings in general) according to the necessary rational principles for our judging (a proof κατ᾽ αληθειαν or κατ᾽ ανθρωπον, taking the latter word in the broadest sense to stand for human beings in general). In the first case it is grounded on sufficient principle for the determining power of judgment, in the second merely on sufficient principles for the reflecting power of judgment. In the latter case, if it rests on merely theoretical principles, it can never produce conviction; but if it is based on a practical principle of reason [*legt er aber ein praktisches Vernunftprincip zum Grunde*] (which is thus universally and necessarily valid), then it can make a sufficient claim of conviction from a purely practical point of view, i.e., moral conviction. (*CPJ* 5:462.35–463.9)[22]

The proof that would determine the object "in itself" would rely on the use of determinative judgment and would treat the object of the idea of God as given in empirical intuition.[23] The proof that determines an object with respect to what the object would be "for us" is based on the reflecting power of judgment. By the reflecting power of judgment that rests on theoretical principles and that cannot produce conviction Kant has in mind physical or natural theology. At the beginning of §90, he notes that this type of proof is a "pseudo-proof" (*Scheinbeweis*) (*CPJ* 5:461.23) that can only produce persuasion and not conviction. This is the notion of reflection according to which we compare different appearances of nature that lead to our observation of nature's overall order and purposiveness. In other words, natural theology argues for God's existence on a "merely subjective (aesthetic) determining ground for assent" (*CPJ* 5:461.19–20), namely, on the *appearance* of nature's order, by taking advantage of reason's *theoretical* need to seek unity in variety, or to "conceive of one principle instead of many as long as it can do so without contradiction" (*CPJ* 5:461.34–5). This reflection ends in *theoretical determination* of nature as purposive and the illegitimate inference to the existence of an intelligent world-cause, God, who is the author of this purposiveness. But if reflective judgment is based on a "practical principle of reason," then it pro-

---

22 I also discuss this passage briefly in Ostaric (2017).
23 These are the syllogistic, analogical, hypothetical proofs on which Kant elaborates in §90. Given the limited scope of this essay, I will not discuss them in detail here. It suffices to note that the problem these proofs share is the impossibility of making theoretical determinations about the being that transcends the phenomenal realm.

duces "moral conviction." Reflective judgment that is based on reason's practical principle would still be using "subjective" determining grounds insofar as the representation of nature according to reflective judgment is relative to the limitations of our human understanding, and the principle applied is heautonomous and does not determine nature as it is in itself. But if reflective judgment is based on a "practical principle," the proof would be "objectively valid and a logical ground for cognition" (*CPJ* 5:461.21).

Kant's division of reflective judgment into those that are grounded on "theoretical principles" and those that are grounded on "practical principles" is puzzling. Now, we know that reflective judgment for Kant is not based on any 'practical principle' as he claims in the above-cited passage and we should consider this as a careless formulation on Kant's part. Instead, reflective judgment is based, if aesthetic, on the a priori principle of purposiveness without a purpose; if teleological, on the concept of the objective purposiveness of nature, which is the principle of reason for the reflecting power of judgment; and if logical, on reason's logical principle of nature's purposiveness. However, to refer to reason's principle of purposiveness in reflective judgment's regulative employment as 'practical' indicates the perspective of the transcendental philosopher who, like the natural theologian, starts from nature's *appearance* of order but, unlike the natural theologian, understands this order as reflective judgment's representation of nature relative to the needs of our cognitive faculties.[24] Put differently, from the perspective of the transcendental philosopher, reflective judgment is governed by reason's principle of purposiveness and it reflects on given sensible particulars which, from the perspective of our limited human understanding, would remain underdetermined.[25]

---

[24] Ina Goy argues that in *CPJ* Kant advances "his own version of physico-theology" (Goy 2017, 268). Unlike the inference of the natural theologian who proceeds from the sensible (the empirically given) to the supersensible, on "Kant's version" of natural theology the inference proceeds from "the idea of a natural end, which is already conceptual, away from the experience into the supersensible" (Goy 2017, 283). Even if we may to some extent agree on what constitutes Kant's own "critical" version of natural theology, the question that remains is why for Kant reflective judgment may be employed in the service of offering a "proof" of God's existence.

[25] In his essay *What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?* (1793) Kant writes as follows: "The moral argument would thus be describable as an *argumentum* κατ' ανθρωπον, valid for rational creatures generally, and not merely for the contingently adopted thought-habit of this man or that; and would have to be distinguished from the theoretico-dogmatic κατ' αληθειαν, which claims more to be certain than man can possibly know" (*Progress* 20:306.1–6). While in the third *Critique* the proof 'according to a human being' is assigned to reflective judgment, in *Progress* it designates the moral proof.

The transcendental philosopher sees the work of reflective judgment as the *condition* of nature's appearance of order. The relation of the parts to the whole in some natural phenomena (organisms) would remain contingent and because reason demands that their relation be necessary the reflective judgment applies the a priori principle of objective purposiveness to its own procedure. Put differently, the reflective judgment represents the relation of the parts of the organism as lawful and necessary by representing organisms as the cause and effect of themselves. Based on reflective judgment's representation of organisms as 'natural ends,' we are justified in representing the whole nature as an organized system. The transcendental philosopher understands the natural order as contingently purposive for our *minimal* cognitive aims: our representation of natural ends and nature's entirety as an organized system aids our exploration of nature and its scientific laws. However, given the ends of practical reason, the realization of the highest good in the world, the thought of nature's contingent purposiveness with our minimal cognitive aims of reason also suggests that nature may be cooperative with the *final* ends of reason as well. It is in this sense that we should understand Kant's comment that reflective judgment is based on a 'practical principle,' insofar as, from the perspective of the transcendental philosopher, reflective judgment's regulative principle of purposiveness refers to reason's both theoretical *and* practical needs.

It is still puzzling why Kant would give the status of reflective judgment and the heautonomous employment of reason's a priori principle of purposiveness the status of a "proof" for the existence of God, albeit one that is "according to the human being" and one that, unlike the proof of natural theology, can produce conviction, namely, a "moral" one. What could Kant possibly mean by this? One way to answer this question is to argue that the justification of assent in moral *Glaube* refers to the object supplied by reflective judgment and not *merely* to the object supplied by rational necessitation from the need of practical reason. The work of reflective teleological judgment is required because something real is given in the manifold that is excessive for determinative judgment, namely, a living being. Kant leaves as a possibility the mechanical generation of living things and, hence, an understanding, unlike our own, that could explain the constitution of living things entirely in mechanical terms, that is, the whole in terms of the properties and functions of its constitutive parts (see *CPJ* 5:408.32–7). But, given *our* human perspective, the concrete experience of nature (more specifically life) suggests the idea of an intelligent designer. Put differently, the view of nature that is demanded by the needs of practical reason is presented from the perspective of theoretical reason and its needs, namely, reflective judgment's representation of nature as purposive given our concrete experience of life in nature. Thus, the fact that Kant refers to the work of reflective judgment from the perspective of

the transcendental philosopher as a "proof of God's existence according to a human being" should be understood from the perspective of the unity of theoretical and practical reason.[26] That is to say, that the transcendental philosopher does not merely "conceive" that there is God from the perspective of the truth of the moral law but also, given the work of reflective judgment and its representation of the natural as a rationally organized whole, she is able to "perceive" it in nature. That which practical reason demands that we conceive as possible (the progress towards the realization of the final end of creation, the highest good) *receives its object* from reflective judgment in response to the needs of theoretical reason.

In this respect, the objective reality of the idea of the highest good accomplished by reflective judgment is not the same as the objective reality of the idea of the highest good reached by rational necessitation from the need of practical reason. We can call the objective reality of the idea of the highest good accomplished by reflective judgment "moral image realism" (MIR).[27] On the surface it may seem contradictory to call "realism" a view according to which the world is an "image." However, the word "image" refers to the heautonomy of reflective judgment. Reflective judgment heautonomously prescribes a rule to itself and not to nature, that is, it prescribes how it *ought to* proceed in our reflection on certain natural formations relative to the needs of our limited human cognitive capacities. In this process, reflective judgment creates an image of the world that serves as a

---

26 In *Progress*, Kant approaches the same issue from the perspective of the unity of metaphysics. There he argues that because metaphysics is intended traditionally as a theoretical science, the third stage of its progress, the transition from sensible (metaphysics of nature) to super-sensible (metaphysics of morals) is a contradiction because there is no theoretical knowledge of the super-sensible. "But," writes Kant, "among the concepts pertaining to knowledge of nature, whatever they may be, we still find one having the special feature, that by means of it we can grasp, not what is in the object, but rather what we can make intelligible to ourselves by the mere fact of imputing it to the object; which is therefore actually no constituent of knowledge of the object, but still a means or ground of knowledge given by reason, and this of theoretical, but yet not to that extent dogmatic knowledge. And this is the concept of a *purposiveness* of nature, which can also be an object of experience, and is thus, not a transcendent, but an immanent concept" (*Progress* 20:293.23–32). For Kant, the a priori principle of purposiveness is a means of *theoretical* knowledge of nature even though this knowledge could never amount to knowledge of the objects of nature (i. e., it is not "dogmatic" or pertaining to "dogmata," a body of synthetic a priori propositions derived from concepts). Although the principle of purposiveness leads to the super-sensible (the idea of the highest good as the final end of nature and the ideas of God, freedom and immortality as the necessary conditions of its realization), the representation of nature as purposive is not a mere projection of the needs of practical reason but a concept that is immanent and, even if it does not constitute it, is indirectly conducive to our cognition of nature. This is the reason why below I refer to Kant's teleology as "Moral Image Realism" (MIR).

27 I borrow the term "moral image" from Henrich (1992).

schema analogue of the idea of the highest good insofar as it represents the world not only as a scene of theoretical exploration but also as a scene of action—the representation of the world as amenable to the realization of our moral ends. On the other hand, this "image" of the world, or the representation of the world created by reflective judgment, is not a mere illusion of an instrumental sort, that is, the one that reason generates given its practical needs. Instead, it is a condition of the possibility of experience of life in nature. To be sure, by means of reflective judgment we cannot offer an "explanation" (*Erklärung*) of the constitution of organic beings, "a distinct and determinate derivation of the possibility of a natural product." That is to say, we cannot give an account of their origin and lawfulness by the use of determinative principles so that this account would be true of them. We have to limit ourselves to offering an "elucidation" (*Erörterung*) (*CPJ* 5:412.17), to wit, to making the regularity and functioning of organisms "intelligible" (*verständlich*) (*CPJ* 5:413.23) to ourselves. Even so, reflective judgment's representation of organisms and nature as a whole assists in our exploration of nature and discovery of new empirical laws. Given that reflective judgment's representation of nature is conducive to our cognition and to the scientific study of nature, this "image" has not merely an intersubjective validity but in some sense an objective reality a mere illusion could never have.

6 Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that in the third *Critique*, Kant neither simply rejects natural theology in light of the moral proof of God's existence he offered in the second *Critique*, nor does he incorporate natural theology into his moral proof in order to address two different aspects of God's existence, the existence of God as a theoretical and the existence of God as a practical being. While Kant clearly maintains the sufficiency of the moral proof and criticizes physico-teleological proof for its invalid inference and its inadequacy for offering a proper theology, he leaves room for a complex cooperation between the two proofs. On a psychological level, the appearance of nature's order reduces the gap between two ontologically distinct realms, the phenomenal realm of nature and the noumenal realm in which the moral proof is grounded, thereby making us more receptive to the claims of the latter. Furthermore, if our theoretical exploration of nature is to amount to a scientific knowledge of nature, the appearance of nature's order must amount to a system of nature which culminates in a final end. The latter, however, requires moral teleology and the representation of nature as a creation of an intelligent and moral being.

However, the most intricate cooperation between moral and physical teleology is the one in which the latter undergoes Kant's proper critical appropriation, that is, where physical teleology does not amount to a mere appearance of natural order but where the appearance of natural order is understood as a product of reflective judgment and its a priori principle of purposiveness in response to the limitations of our cognitive capacities and the need of reason to search for necessary and not merely contingent relations in nature. It is on this view of nature's contingent fit with not merely our minimal cognitive ends but also our final moral ends that reflective judgment governed by the a priori principle of nature's purposiveness (which is Kant's own critical version of physical teleology) is put in the service of offering a proof of God's existence κατ' ανθρωπον.

The latter should not be understood as bringing into question the sufficiency of the moral proof. Instead, we should think of it as Kant's growing concern with the problem of reason's unity. Thus, it is not sufficient to be justified in conceiving intellectually that there is God and that nature is created with our moral aims in mind. That which practical reason demands that we conceive as possible we must be able to represent as real and obtaining in nature even though this reality is merely the one "sufficient for the reflecting power of judgment" (*CPJ* 5: 479.14–15). This does not mean that Kant is regressing into dogmatism. The representation of nature as purposively organized is reflective judgment's representation in response to the demand of *reason.* It is an "image" of nature as amenable to our theoretical needs insofar as it makes organisms as natural ends intelligible and insofar as it makes possible the discovery of particular empirical laws. But by virtue of reason's unity, that is, the fact that reason is theoretical and also practical, the amenability of nature to the cognitive ends of reason suggests its amenability to the practical ends of reason as well. It suggests the view of nature that conceives of it as a creation that has our practical, that is, moral ends in mind.

References

Ameriks, Karl, *Kant's Elliptical Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb, *Metaphysica* (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1739/1757, 4th ed.).

Engstrom, Stephen, "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52.4 (1992), 747–80.

Förster, Eckart, "Die Wandlungen in Kants Gotteslehre," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 52.3 (1998), 341–62.

Goy, Ina, *Kants Theorie der Biologie: ein Kommentar, eine Leseart, eine historische Einordnung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

Henrich, Dieter, *Aesthetic Judgement and the Moral Image of the World: Studies in Kant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Hume, David (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. by Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Ostaric, Lara, "Practical Cognition, Reflective Judgment, and the Realism of Kant's Moral *Glaube*," in *Moral Realism or Antirealism in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, ed. by Robinson dos Santos and Elke Elisabeth Schmidt (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2017), 89–115.

Ostaric, Lara, *The* Critique of Judgment *and the Unity of Kant's Critical System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

Lawrence Pasternack

Kant's Moral Argument and the Problem of Evil: Authentic Theodicy and the Sincerity of Faith

1 Introduction

If there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent creator of all things, it seems reasonable to think that such a deity would ensure that no evil in the world exists. Hence, while rejection of the classical proofs for God's existence (ontological, cosmological, design) might promote agnosticism, the problem of evil is often touted as one of the most forceful philosophical arguments for atheism.

Of course, there are numerous rebuttals to the above, including: (a) contrary to appearances, there is no actual evil in the world; (b) there is evil, but it is unavoidable in light of the intrinsic nature of the finite, physical, universe; and (c) God cannot prevent evil without taking away the overriding goodness of free will.

In his 1791 "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy," Kant explores nine different attempts to "vindicate" God, and concludes in each case that they fail. More broadly, Kant seeks to "bring this trial to an end *once and for all*" (*Theodicy* 8:263.20), not just by rebutting specific theodicies one by one, but rather by appeal to "the necessary limitation of what we may presume with respect to that which is too high for us" *(Theodicy* 8:263.18–19). In other words, while each of the nine rebuttals serve to illustrate what happens when theoretical reason seeks to extend itself beyond the "necessary limitation" of our epistemic powers, Kant's deeper strategy is tied to the fundamental epistemic "restriction thesis" of transcendental idealism as well as his division between theoretical and practical reason. For Kant's 1791 treatment of theodicy reflects his dictum that the limits to knowledge must first be established "in order to make room for faith" (*CPR* B xxx).

It is the purpose of this chapter to consider how the *Theodicy* illuminates Kant's understanding of moral faith, and more specifically, how deeply intertwined the problem of evil is with his moral argument. As we shall see, Kant not only thinks that pure practical reason offers a successful "authentic" theodicy, in contrast to the failed "doctrinal" theodicies of theoretical reason, but that theodicy, and thus the problem of evil, is built into the religious outlook of the morally faithful.

We will begin with an overview of how the moral argument is presented by Kant in the three *Critique*s. We will then briefly summarize the nine "doctrinal" attempts to "vindicate" God, highlighting those that may be confused with his eventual "authentic" response. From there, we will turn to what Kant means by "authentic" theodicy and how it relates to the moral argument. We will then pause to briefly consider two "doctrinal" theodicies which may seem to step over into the territory of "authentic theodicy." This chapter will then close by bringing together various comments on the sincerity of faith found in the *Theodicy*'s "Concluding Remark."

2 The Moral Argument

Kant's moral argument is best understood as an argument for the motivational value of religious belief. At its core, the moral argument maintains that religious beliefs help one offset a number of hindrances to moral resolve that we human beings face. Kant highlights different hindrances in different texts, but they include our need for personal happiness, the presence of evil in the world, and injustice.

One way in which the moral argument is distinct from other arguments for God's existence is that it is not an argument to the conclusion that God exists.[1] But rather, it is an argument to the conclusion that one ought to believe in God. In this regard, the moral argument is "subjective" in the sense that it is an argument meant to promote a mental state, rather than "objective" in the sense that it is meant to demonstrate that some fact about the world obtains. As Kant famously puts this point: "I must not even say 'It is morally certain that there is a God,' etc., but rather 'I am morally certain' etc." (*CPR* A 829/B 857).

Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that the subjective attitude promoted by the moral argument is merely an "as if" fictionalism, or regulative principle

1 While Allen Wood labels the moral argument as a "practical" rather "theoretical" argument in this volume, he nevertheless seems to regard the argument as tendering "the *theoretical* conclusion that there is a God" (see page 268), rather than that one ought to believe in God. Given Wood's language, this may sound as if the *conclusion of the moral argument is that God exists*, rather that that one ought to believe in God. By contrast, I will present *the conclusion of the moral argument to be that one ought to believe*. Nevertheless, as belief in God involves a commitment to God's objective reality, one may say that the outcome of the acceptance of the moral argument's conclusion is a "theoretical" commitment.

that does not bring with it a positive ontological commitment.[2] Rather, Kant presents the moral argument as promoting a propositional attitude, namely faith (*Glaube*), which he categorizes as a mode of "holding-to-be-true."[3] He also presents this as a commitment to the objective reality of the objects of faith (e. g. *CprR* 5:132.17, *CprR* 5:135.7). In fact, of all Kant's discussions of faith, the one found in the *Theodicy* most fervently emphasizes the importance of sincerity: there should be no "pretending to hold anything as true" (*Theodicy* 8:268.20). "As if" fictionalism, on the other hand, downgrades the whole reason why, for Kant, faith matters. We will return to this topic later in this chapter. First, however, let us look at three of the best known versions of the moral argument, for it will be crucial to understand certain details of the argument in order to see how it provides Kant with his "authentic" response to the problem of evil.[4]

2.1 *Critique of Pure Reason* (MA₁)

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant *appears* to continue to hold on to his pre-critical picture of moral agency. In the *Collins Lectures*,[5] Kant distinguishes between the moral "principal of appraisal and obligation" versus the motivational "principle of its performance or execution" (*Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27.1:274.22–4). For Kant, at the time, while morality is a matter of objective laws, these laws have no impact on the will. Hence, quite unlike what we find in the *Groundwork* and after, the lectures state that "intellectual inclination is a contradiction" (*Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27.1:275.23–4) and "a feeling for objects of the understanding

---

2 The "as if" reading of Kant has its roots in Vaihinger (1911). More recently, it can be found in DiCenso (2012) and Jay (2014).
3 Central works on Kant's understanding of *Glaube* include Stevenson (2003), Chignell (2007), Pasternack (2011a).
4 In addition to the versions of the moral argument in the three *Critique*s, Kant also provides an argument in "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking" (*Orientation* 8:137.4–9.32) and in the first "Preface" of the *Religion* (6:4.11–6.11). Due to space constraints, I cannot discuss these further arguments here, but both deserve analysis. The argument in the *Orientation* essay is important because it is gives us insights into why Kant continues to hold onto the highest good after the developments in his theory of agency seen in the *Groundwork*. For further discussion of the moral argument during the interim between the first and second *Critique*s, see Chance and Pasternack (2018). The version of the moral argument found in the *Religion*, though in some ways similar to the argument of the third *Critique*, further illustrates how in light of the "hindrances" to our moral resolve, "morality leads inevitably to religion" (*Rel.* 6:6.8, see also *Rel.* 6:8.37).
5 Although the Collins lecture notes are dated to 1784/5, they are believed to be transcriptions of lectures from the mid-1770s.

is in itself an absurdity" (*Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27.1:275.24–5). That is, Kant had not yet come to the possibility of the will determined by pure practical reason (i. e. *acting from duty*), at least per the "semi-critical" interpretation.[6]

Likewise, in the "Canon" of the first *Critique*, Kant writes that "the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization" (*CPR* A 813/B 841). So, to bridge that divide, i. e., to bring the ideas of morality to affect the will, Kant proposes that we leverage our natural desire for happiness.

The argument, let us call it MA_1, can be understood as follows:

1) We ought to observe the laws of morality (*CPR* A 807/B 835).
2) The desire for happiness has an influence on the will (*CPR* A 808/B 836).
3) But the laws of morality on their own do not have an influence on the will (*CPR* A 813/B 841).
4) By leveraging the desire for happiness on behalf of morality, morality can thereby have an influence on the will (*CPR* A 813/B 841).
5) Hence, if agents were to believe that they will receive happiness in proportion to their moral worth, then they will observe the laws of morality in order to receive happiness (*CPR* A 812/B 840).
6) However, no connection between morality and happiness can be attributed to "the nature of things, nor by the causality of [human] actions" (*CPR* A 810/B 838).
7) Such a connection is only possible through God (*CPR* A 811/B 839).
8) Thus, in order for us to observe the laws of morality, we ought to believe in God (*CPR* A 811/B 839).

Salient presuppositions in the above include: a belief-desire model of the will, and that neither nature itself nor human actions within the order of nature are capable of bringing morality and happiness into the needed connection.

---

6 The similarities between Kant's description of moral motivation in the "Canon" and in the *Collins Lectures* strongly suggests that Kant had not yet come to the picture of moral agency seen in the *Groundwork* and beyond. This thesis is discussed in Allison (1990, 66–82). In his chapter in this volume, Wood rightly takes issue with Allison's treatment of the "Canon", contending that while Kant "does not yet relate morality to the concept of autonomy" (see page 276), the text can still be interpreted as offering a model of agency where autonomy is operant despite the motivational role given to happiness. That is, if there is a moral interest in the "whole end" which includes morality and happiness, Wood takes the picture of agency in the "Canon" to be one of autonomy. Note that the reconstruction of the argument MA_1 is intended to reflect a semi-critical reading of the "Canon." Ultimately, however, I do believe that Wood's view is more accurate and thus MA_1 should not be read as my view. Personally, I would amend premises (3)–(5) to instead speak to the need to understand our moral "resolve" in relation to our "whole end" as finite beings.

Very briefly, Kant's reasons for the latter include an earlier assertion, found in the solution to the third antinomy, that "*ought*, if one has merely the course of nature before one's eyes, has no significance whatsoever" (*CPR* A 547/B 575). Further, Kant does not believe that humanity has the capacity to bring morality and happiness into either an "exact relation" or "necessary connection" (*CPR* A 810/B 838). While we certainly could organize social systems to help align morality and happiness, our powers are quite far from being able to ensure an exact and necessary connection between happiness and moral worth. For neither do we have the power to control the causal order so exactly, nor do we have the epistemic powers to assess anyone's moral worth so as to then allocate to them how much happiness they deserve.[7] Hence, Kant regards God as necessary for this distribution since the coordination between morality and happiness cannot just be partial, cannot be accidental, and is to be a coordination with the inner life of the agent (a being able to know that inner life thus is required as judge).[8]

2.2 *Critique of Practical Reason* (MA$_2$)

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*'s "Dialectic", Kant offers a very different version of the moral argument. To many readers, it is surprising that Kant continues to employ the concept of the highest good and its postulates at all, since the standard view is that it is rooted in a semi-critical model of agency, no longer operant by the time of the *Groundwork.* Nevertheless, the highest good and its postulates

---

7 It might be questioned what moral status the will could attain if, at this point in Kant's philosophical development, there still is no acting from duty. One answer to this is that while Kant, at this time, held that morality cannot directly move the will, he nevertheless argues on moral grounds that we ought to cultivate a worldview such that what does drive our actions can be directed towards morality. See note 6. Further, if it is our inner life that is the basis for our moral desert, then, as expressed by Anderson-Gold (2001, 31), "our epistemological limitations render us incapable of making the type of moral assessment of worthiness necessary to be 'just distributors'."

8 Of course, one might still contend that agents could be agnostic about how morality leads to happiness, but still hold just the hope that somehow it will obtain. As Wood notes (see in this volume page 282), that is a viable option. Yet it is not the one taken by Kant. Perhaps due to the times in which he lived, or his desire to somehow find a way back to Christian doctrine, Kant maintains that the motivational connection at issue requires that the agent has a specific picture of how the just distribution of happiness could obtain. We will return to this issue later.

are framed in the second *Critique* by way of a more architectonic analysis of the nature of practical agency.[9]

In its "Dialectic", Kant characterizes the highest good as the "unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason" (*CprR* 5:108.11–12) and the "whole *object* of a pure practical reason" (*CprR* 5:109.21–2). It is part of the formal structure of willing itself as the practical *unconditioned condition* that practical reason necessarily sets for itself. No longer does it seem an ideal that can be leveraged for motivational purposes, but it is an inherent object for the will. Of course, we may choose against it (just as we may choose against observing the moral law), but it no longer appears to be just a psychologically useful device to get us to be moral.

The argument for religious belief in the second *Critique* is divided over a number of sections. The first portion of the argument is presented by way of an antinomy concerning how morality and happiness combine in the highest good. Their relation is not analytic, but synthetic; in all syntheses one concept must serve as "ground," and the other as "consequent" (*CprR* 5:111.7); and given the rational authority of morality, it is morality that serves as the ground in its synthesis with happiness (*CprR* 5:113.27–9). That is, the highest good is an ideal state of affairs in which "happiness [is] distributed in exact proportion to morality" (*CprR* 5:110.33).

As in the first *Critique*, this distribution cannot take place through the order of nature, or our efforts therein: "no necessary connection of happiness with virtue in the world, adequate to the highest good, can be expected from the most meticulous observation of moral laws" (*CprR* 5:113.34–114.1). It thus requires a being with the capacity to know our moral worth and the capacity to secure the exact amount of happiness we are due. Hence, again, Kant holds that God is required. Thus far, the moral argument of the second *Critique* can be rendered as follows:

1) We have a duty to promote the highest good.
2) Given *ought implies can*, the highest good must be possible.
3) It is only possible by way of God.
4) God must exist.

The above, however, does not capture the whole of the argument. While the language Kant uses when discussing the "Antinomy of Practical Reason" and its resolution suggests an objective rather than subjective conclusion (i.e., God exists vs.

---

9 Further discussion of the highest good during the period between the first and second *Critique*s can be found in Chance and Pasternack (2018).

we must believe in God), the penultimate section of the "Dialectic", "On Assent from a Need of Pure Reason," conveys a different picture.

There, the text resonates with the *absurdum practicum* argument of Kant's lectures (e. g. *Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1083.23, *Danzig Rat. Theol. Baumbach* 28/2.2:1291.36), as he writes that "granted that the pure moral law inflexibly binds everyone as a command (not as a rule of prudence), the upright man may well say: I *will* that there be a God" (*CprR* 5:143.24–5). The "upright man," Kant then further explains, comes to this commitment by way of a choice, a "voluntary determination" (*CprR* 5:146.6–8).

In light of that choice, let us render MA$_2$ as follows:

1) The "command to promote the highest good is based objectively (in practical reason)" (*CprR* 5:145.23–4).
2) Theoretical reason can determine nothing with regards to how the highest good is possible other than,
3) "[R]eason finds it *impossible for it* to conceive, in the mere course of nature, a connection so exactly proportioned" (*CprR* 5:145.14–17).
4) So, the choice before one is to either (a) affirm the duty without having a conception of how it might obtain, or (b) adopt some conceptualization of it.
5) The only way to fill in (b) is through postulating God and immortality (*CprR* 5:145).
6) The "upright man" recognizes that his practical commitment to promoting the highest good benefits from adopting a conception of how it is possible (*CprR* 5:146).
7) Thus, the upright man chooses to believe in God (and immortality).[10]

In short, where MA$_1$ calls for belief in God in order to leverage our interest in happiness so as to drive moral conduct, MA$_2$ calls for belief in God based upon the following additional presuppositions. First, as the "total object" of the will, the coherence of practical reason itself depends upon the highest good being possible: as "an a priori necessary object of our will and inseparably bound up with the moral law, the impossibility of the first must also prove the falsity of the second" (*CprR* 5:114.3–5). Second, Kant tells us that our belief *that* the highest good is possible is not enough: conceptualizing *how* it is possible is of further motivational importance.

---

[10] We may correlate this argument to Wood's (see page 278 in this volume) as follows. Pasternack premise 1 = Wood premise 1; Pasternack premise 2 = roughly Wood premise 2; Pasternack premises 3–5 = Wood premise 4; Pasternack premise 6 = roughly Wood premise 3; and LRP conclusion 7 = Wood conclusion 5.

In addition to this more architectonic argument, we can find in the second *Critique* some further reflections that connect religious belief to our desire for happiness. Specifically, Kant remarks in the "Dialectic" that one's own happiness "is included" (*CprR* 5:130.1) in the highest good. Such an inclusion, however, is not used as the reason why we should promote the highest good, as seemed the case in the first *Critique.* Rather, Kant presents the highest good as a vehicle for reconciling our desire for happiness with morality. He writes: "after the moral wish, based on a law, to promote the highest good (to bring the kingdom of God to us) has been awakened [...] for the sake of this wish the step into religion has been taken [...] for the first time can this ethical doctrine also be called a doctrine of happiness, because it is only with religion that the *hope* of happiness first arises" (*CprR* 5:130.22–7).

As we shall see, this is an important point for Kant's *Theodicy:* the upright man does not only observe the duties of morality, but has, by way of religion, brought his natural interest in happiness into his moral life.[11] Let us now move on to the moral argument in the third *Critique,* the version of the moral argument most immediately prior to the 1791 *Theodicy.*

2.3 *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (MA₃)

§87 of the third *Critique*, titled "On the Moral Proof of the Existence of God," presents the highest good as *a priori* given to us as the final end for our moral striving. It is again presented by Kant as an ideal state of affairs in which happiness is distributed in proportion to moral worth (*CPJ* 5:450), and he again proposes that this distribution cannot be understood as possible either through "merely natural causes" or "by means of the application of our own powers" (*CPJ* 5:450.19–22). Hence, Kant continues to hold that "we must assume a moral cause of the world (an author of the world), namely, that there is a God" (*CPJ* 5:450.29–30). As such, the third *Critique* initially gives us essentially the same argument as that of the second *Critique.*[12]

Also, like its formulation in the second *Critique*, Kant again supplements his reasoning in such a way that the conclusion is not quite to God's existence, but rather to the practical need we have to believe in God's existence. This time, how-

---

11 Note that even in the first *Critique*, Kant presents our natural inclinations as "hindrances to morality" (*CPR* A 809/B 837). For further discussion of our natural desire for happiness and the moral argument, see Fugate (2016, 315–30).

12 This is especially so when considering Wood's (see page 278 in this volume) reading of the moral argument.

ever, Kant gives us a different explanation of why the righteous must come to faith. In the first *Critique*, the reason given was to leverage our interest in happiness (given that the will cannot be determined by reason alone). In the second *Critique*, the reason given was, somewhat amorphously, that we are more morally empowered if we have a way of conceiving how the highest good is possible versus if we do not. Kant also sees that our interest in happiness needs to be brought into morality, else it can operate as a hindrance to our resolve.[13]

Now, however, rather than focusing on our interest in our own happiness and its potential to hinder our moral resolve, Kant provides us with the example of a righteous atheist and how an atheistic worldview would hinder us morally. As he explains, the atheist has a very grim picture of life and death. The world overflows with "all the evils of poverty, illness, and untimely death" (*CPJ* 5:452.25) and no matter how upright one is through life, "one wide grave engulfs" us all (i.e. ultimately we all suffer the same fate). Such a worldview, he then argues, will likewise hinder us morally. Where previously his focus was on our desire for our own happiness, Kant now argues that a world seen in this grim light will put great pressure on one's moral conviction: if there is no justice and if our moral efforts are swamped by the "purposeless chaos of matter" (*CPJ* 5:452.29), one would "certainly have to give up as impossible" (*CPJ* 5:452.32) the *a priori* end given to us by practical reason.[14]

In effect, what Kant is here proposing is that there is a moral need for theism, for without it we cannot see how the highest good is possible, and without this possibility, the anguish of seeing worldly suffering and injustice will do "damage to the moral disposition." (*CPJ* 5:452.37). Let us thus render MA$_3$ as follows:

1) Reason gives us the highest good as an *a priori* end (*CPJ* 5:450.7).
2) We cannot conceive of the highest good as possible either through the course of nature or through our own efforts (*CPJ* 5:450.17–25).

---

13 Although the highest good is surprisingly absent in the *Groundwork*, we see even there that Kant recognizes that our natural desire for happiness can operate as a hindrance to our moral resolve and thus, in some manner or another, needs to be brought into relation with morality. Hence, there too, *for moral purposes*, he recognizes that the moral agent must somehow attend to their need for happiness (*GMM* 4:399).

14 Of course, one may rebut that there is more room for moral optimism within an atheistic worldview than Kant allows. This is the case for those interpreters of the highest good who propose that in the 1790s Kant abandoned the postulate of immortality. I challenge the textual merits of this reading at length in Pasternack (2017). In short, while such optimism is a perfectly reasonable philosophical stance to take, it does not reflect Kant's own views, either during the 1780s or 1790s. Interpreters (incl. Rawls, Reath, Guyer and Moran) who think otherwise are misreading and/or ignoring a considerable amount of textual evidence. For a discussion of the difficulties with this interpretive trend, see Pasternack (2017, 443–7).

3) The highest good is not possible without God (*CPJ* 5:450.26–30).
4) If one denies God's existence, one thereby denies the possibility of the highest good (from 3).
5) Denying the highest good would have one see the world as ultimately without justice (*CPJ* 5:452.8–30).
6) To see the world as ultimately without justice leads to moral despair (*CPJ* 5:452.30–37).
7) Since one ought out to prevent moral despair, one must believe in God (and the highest good) (*CPJ* 5:453.1–5).

Now, with the above in mind, let us turn to the *Theodicy*. As we shall see, elements within Kant's moral argument underlie what he presents as the "authentic" response to the problem of evil.

3 Kant's *Theodicy*

The first half of the 1791 "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy" Kant presents three divine attributes (holiness, goodness, justice) and pits them against three theodicic problems (moral evil, pain, injustice). The result is an analysis of nine different attempts to "vindicate" God.[15] In short, these nine are as follows:

I The absolute counterpurposiveness of immorality (unholiness) in the world

a. There is no moral evil in the world, just the appearances of such. The rebuttal is that this vindication would cost us too much as it would mean we are not in a position to make moral assessments.

b. Moral evil cannot be prevented, for it is due to the finitude of human nature. The rebuttal is that if it cannot be prevented, then it falls outside our free will and thus is not a matter of morality any longer.

---

15 Note that the Ia, b, c, IIa, b, c structure is Kant's own. I. pertains to theodicies related to holiness/ moral evil; II. pertains to theodicies related to goodness/ pain; III. pertains to theodicies related to justice/ injustice. Interpretations of the a, b, c structure are more varied and cannot be suitably examined here. For one presentation of the 3x3 structure of theodicies, see Huxford (2020, 97–109).

c. God is not guilty even if we commit moral evil because the possibility of such evil is grounded in a higher good (that we have free will). Kant rebuts that this just takes us back to the problematic that if free will entails the potential to do evil, then the existence of that potential is due to the "inescapable limitations of human beings" (*Rel.* 6:7.21) and thus neither can we nor God be held liable.

II The conditional counterpurposiveness of pain in the world

a. If living is better than not living, then it is better to live in a world with some pain than to not live at all. Kant replies that this is "sophistry" since the options are not merely live or not live, but that so long as a better life could have been possible for one, then pain is not vindicated.

b. Pain is inevitable given the "the nature of an animal creature" (*Theodicy* 8:259.37–260.1). Kant's reply is that if life is ultimately not good because of our animal nature, then God presumably should never have created us.

c. The purpose of this life and its suffering is to give us the opportunity to become worthy of a "future happiness," a "hoped-for superabundant blessedness" (*Theodicy* 8:260.13–14). Kant's response here is somewhat cryptic: "in this way one can indeed cut the knot loose through an appeal to the highest wisdom which will it, but one cannot untie the knot, which is what theodicy claims to do" (*Theodicy* 8:260.22–5). We may take this to mean: we may grant this as a solution in general terms, but it does not tell us anything about the rules for worthiness, why God chose this, or the nature of the "future happiness." We will return to IIc below.

III Counterpurposiveness as disproportion between crimes and penalties

a. Every crime brings with it "the inner reproach of conscience" (*Theodicy* 8:261.3–4). Kant's response is that the morally depraved do not "place themselves with self-inflicted rebukes" (*Theodicy* 8:261.13–14).

b. "[I]t is a property of virtue that it should wrestle with adversities" (*Theodicy* 8:261.25–6), hence injustice is justified insofar as it helps bring virtue. Kant, however, responds that this is not a vindication so long as the virtuous are not ultimately rewarded, for otherwise injustice remains.

c. God ultimately will judge our wills and reward or punish accordingly in a "future world" (*Theodicy* 8:262.17). Such a defense, however, does not flow from

"the mere laws of theoretical cognition" (*Theodicy* 8:262.22), which is presumably the sort of reason that theodicies employ. Were we to stay within the bounds of theoretical reason, we would have to ascribe to the "future world" the same causal order as found in this world, and thus justice becomes "as little to be expected there as here" (*Theodicy* 8:262.37). We will return to IIIc below.

Despite the breath of his survey of theodicies, Kant recognizes that it is not exhaustive. Other charges of "counterpurposiveness" could always be levied and thus rather than trying to shut down theodicy by way of an endless series of rebuttals, he wants to bring readers to accept that theoretical reason necessarily oversteps when trying to reconcile God and evil.

A successful theodicy of theoretical reason ultimately involves "the *unity in the agreement* in a sensible world between the artistic and moral wisdom" (*Theodicy* 8:263.28–30). For while we have, through the moral argument, "signpost[s]" of the supersensible (*Orientation* 8:142.1), how these signposts (i. e. the postulates) inform the sensible world "is an insight to which no mortal can attain" (*Theodicy* 8:264.6). Hence, a successful theodicy would require the same sort of theoretical knowledge as that which would be sought if trying to know how the supersensible determines the natural causal order, or how the noumenal grounds the phenomenal. So while Kant provides a lengthy series of theodicies, showing how each one fails, in order to "bring this trial to an end *once and for all*" (*Theodicy* 8:263.20), his more fundamental reason for rejecting all theoretical solutions to the problem of evil is that any putative solution would have to violate the "necessary limitation of what we may presume with respect to that which is too high for us" (*Theodicy* 8:263.18–19).

There, is, however, an important qualifier here: namely, that while all solutions of theoretical reason are doomed to failure, the same does not hold for practical reason's solution to the problem of evil. Kant thus distinguishes between theoretical or "doctrinal" theodicies versus a practical or "authentic" theodicy. Let us now briefly explore this distinction before finally turning to how authentic theodicy relates to the moral argument.

4 Doctrinal vs. Authentic Theodicy

Subsequent to his conclusion that all theodicies of theoretical reason inevitably fail, Kant introduces his distinction between doctrinal and authentic theodicy in the following way: "All theodicy should truly be an *interpretation* of nature insofar as God announces his will through it. Now, every interpretation of the declared will of a legislator is either *doctrinal* or *authentic*" (*Theodicy* 8:264.7–10).

Although his use of "doctrinal" might suggest that Kant is still musing about the "doctrinal belief"[16] he considered in the "Canon" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the terminology he is using here instead comes out of Gottfried Achenwall's *Jus Naturale* (1763), the textbook used by Kant when teaching natural law, as well as his notes on this text. Therein, a distinction is given between a lawmaker providing an interpretation of his own law versus a third party interpreting that law, say a lawyer or court. Because the former is an interpretation given by the author himself, the intent of the law is known and thus the interpretation is named "authentic." By contrast, a third party does not have access to the author's intent and instead uses one or another principle of interpretation. His interpretation is thus "doctrinal" in the sense that it flows from some doctrine of interpretation (*Lect. Nat. Law Feyerabend* 27/2.2:1384.31–2). Kant in fact uses the same terminological distinction elsewhere, such as when discussing how one interprets the Bible (*Rel.* 6:114.21–2, *Faculties* 7:66.5) as well as scientific vs. metaphysical interpretations of nature (*OP* 22:172–4).

Accordingly, because theoretical reason for Kant has no insight into things in themselves, theodicies given by this faculty are removed from insight into the true intent of the legislator (God). However, because the judgments of practical reason are for Kant isomorphic with those of God, practical reason can provide the "authentic" interpretation of God's "will as announced through creation" (*Theodicy* 8:264.27–8). One might thus presume that practical reason, unlike theoretical reason, is thus able to articulate "the *unity in the agreement* in a sensible world between the artistic and moral wisdom" (*Theodicy* 8:263.28–30). But this is also not what Kant intends. For while theoretical reason seeks to "untie the knot" (*Theodicy* 8:260.24), i.e., solve the puzzle, practical reason on the other hand can "cut the knot loose" (*Theodicy* 8:260.22–3), or in other words, offer "the mere dismissal of all objections" (*Theodicy* 8:264.21–2). In fact, what Kant claims is that, given the identification of our practical reason with God's, insofar as practical reason can issue a "dismissal of all objections," we have the "authentic" theodicy of the lawmaker himself. Practical reason thus, reflecting God's will, issues a "*divine decree*" (*Theodicy* 8:264.23) against the problem of evil.

As Kant puts the point: "authentic" interpretation (and thus authentic theodicy) "is not the interpretation of a *ratiocinating* (speculative) reason, but of an *efficacious* practical reason" (*Theodicy* 8:264.29–31). But the question then remains for us, what does practical reason *do* to "cut the knot loose" or dismiss the problem?

---

16 See Huxford (2020, ch. 9). Chignell (2007) proposes that Kant gives serious consideration to a form of theoretical belief in God, there called "doctrinal belief." I agree that this is a mode of belief Kant does briefly consider, but textual evidence suggests that he later abandoned it (for apt philosophical reasons). See Pasternack (2011b).

That is, if authentic theodicy is not giving us an explanation of "the *unity in the agreement* in a sensible world between the artistic and moral wisdom" but rather something practical, what is it? To answer this question, Kant turns to the "Book of Job".

Within his exegesis, Kant associates Job's friends with theoretical reason and thus doctrinal theodicy. They assume that God would never let the righteous suffer as Job has, and thus they "judge *a priori*, that he must have some weighing upon him, for his misfortunate would otherwise be impossible according to divine justice" (*Theodicy* 8:265.18–20).[17] By contrast, Job "protests that his conscience has nothing to reproach him for in his whole life" (*Theodicy* 8:265.21–2) and simply accepts his condition, stating that God "has decided" and "does as he wills" (*Theodicy* 8:265.25). That is, Job does not seek a theoretical solution to explain why he suffers. He does not characterize his suffering as a challenge by which he becomes worthy of future happiness, that God would have him wrestle with these adversities so as to strengthen his virtue, or that his future happiness is already assured (i.e. IIc, IIIb, IIIc). Instead, Job offers no explanation whatsoever.

Job's response may seem like an enunciation of skeptical theism (i.e., apophatic theology), and perhaps in some regard it is. Kant accepts that theoretical reason is unable to solve the problem of evil and thus there is no theoretically salutary explanation. Yet shrugging off the problem of evil as insoluble hardly seems Kant's point. In fact, that would very much be theodicy Ia, which Kant rejects on the grounds that "the vindication is worse than the complaint" (*Theodicy* 8:258.20–1).

While Kant certainly wants to curtail the ventures of theoretical reason, the same is not the case with practical reason. Not only does the latter license us to postulate certain matters within the supersensible, but more directly here, his point is that Ia proposes that our understanding of morality is not the same as God's. That is why "the vindication is worse than the complaint." Put differently, it is not that Kant wants us to abandon theodicy outright, but rather to shift away from theoretical/ doctrinal solutions to the "authentic" theodicy of practical reason. But, still, what is that solution? What does practical reason give us?

An important clue to what Kant is trying to communicate through his use of Job appears towards the end of his exposition, where he writes that authentic theodicy finds its response in the "sincerity of heart [i.e., the nature of religious assent] and not distinction of insight [i.e., not doctrinal content]" (*Theodicy* 8:266.33–4). In other words, the authentic solution to the problem of evil is not to be found in any explanation of how God is vindicated. But rather, the solution

---

17 While not identical to it, we may take their response to be that of IIIb.

is "practical" in that it is about the sincerity of faith itself and how that faith shapes one's life.

This is why Kant does not merely articulate some set of arguments or principles here, but rather uses the "Book of Job" to get us to see what the sincerity of faith does in life. For Job, whose life formerly "included everything which anyone might possibly imagine it as making it complete" (*Theodicy* 8:265.1–2), but then had everything "suddenly snatched from him" (*Theodicy* 8:265.7), and yet neither was his moral conscience nor his faith affected. In short: Job's faith was such that he endured all the evils wrought upon him without losing that faith. When Kant explains how this can be so, he writes, Job "did not found his morality on faith, but his faith on morality" (*Theodicy* 8:267.10–11)—that is, as we shall now discuss, the authentic solution to Theodicy is intertwined with the moral argument.

5 Kant's Moral Argument and the Problem of Evil

The prevalence of religious belief varies greatly between countries, age groups, education levels, and other demographics, from, for example, 84% in the Philippines to just 4% in Japan (Smith 2012). While some intellectuals may purport to believe in virtue of one or another of the classic proofs for God's existence, the majority of theists come to their views through socialization (Sherkat 2003). Both layperson and philosophical approaches to the problem of evil thus may be understood as arising out of, first, a belief in God, second, an acknowledgment that there is evil (or at least apparent evil) in the world, and third, a need to resolve this tension.[18]

The problem of theodicy thus begins with the antecedent belief in God (as omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent) and a belief in the fact (or appearance) of evil. That is, from both the lay and philosophical perspective, the problem of evil emerges as a consequence of two prior, conflicting claims. Hence, we may represent the standard problem as follows:

1) God (omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent) exists.
2) There exists evil in the world.
3) (1) and (2) are incompatible.

---

[18] Interestingly, empirical studies show that lay theodicies track closely with the doctrinal theodicies surveyed by Kant (the most common responses include Ia, Ib, IIc, IIIb), see Mercier et al. (2018).

Obviously, theodicies are meant to overcome (3) by reconciling (1) and (2). But what I want to highlight here is that the problematic as usually approached takes (1) and (2) as two independent claims, the first grounded in either theoretical reason, or perhaps more commonly, just cultural/ psychological forces, and the second, again either a conventional assumption or a judgment based upon experience.

By contrast, what if (1) and (2) were intertwined? What if they were interdependent claims or one claim had its ground in the other? Consider first that for Kant, the judgment that there is evil in the world as well as the belief in God are both matters of practical reason. They arise from the same faculty, and given that reason cannot come into conflict with itself, we may *a priori* deny (3). Secondly, consider how religious belief arises for Kant. He clearly rejects the traditional proofs and is likewise critical of beliefs grounded upon social conventions (*Logic* 9:77–80) and "dependent upon pathological conditions" (*CprR* 5:120.32). Religious belief, for Kant, should rather be rooted in the "needs" of practical reason (*CprR* 5:142.1, *Orientation* 8:137.7), and as we have discussed, specifically in the "need" we have to sustain ourselves in the face of that which hinders our moral resolve.

Hence, when we think back to the moral argument, what we have is claim (1), the belief in God, as grounded in (2), the fact of evil. This is most pronouncedly so in MA$_3$. But we can likewise see it in the second *Critique* and in the *Religion.* While in the case of the former, the moral argument is more immediately connected to our duty to promote the highest good, Kant further connects it to one's own need for happiness, which can otherwise interfere with one's moral resolve (*CprR* 5:130). In the case of the latter, not only do we have in the first "Preface" appeal to the highest good and the postulates to address happiness as a "natural need which would otherwise be a hindrance to moral resolve" (*Rel.* 6:5.17–18), but also in "Part One", as Kant deals with the question of whether or not humanity can, through its own powers, undergo a "change of heart" (*Rel.* 6:47.11), that concern too leads us to appeal to God, whose aid may be needed as we struggle with our propensity to evil.

Be it worldly suffering, injustice, or our propensity to give priority to self-interest over morality, Kant presents our confrontations with evil, in one form or another, as the impetus to religion. In other words, Kant's moral argument in its various forms, starts with an awareness of evil and how it draws us away from morality. The agent then responds to this hindrance by the adoption of a religious worldview.[19] As such, rather than having a belief in God that is endangered by the fact of evil, it is, for Kant, the very fact of evil that brings one to faith.

---

19 In the *Religion*, we see this in both its first "Preface" and "Part One". In the case of the former,

We may therefore understand Job as able to sustain that faith amidst his suffering because that suffering is just an instance (albeit a very personal instance) of why he believes in God in the first place. For unlike Job's friends, whose faith rests on psychological or theoretical grounds, Job based "his faith on morality" (*Theodicy* 8:267.11). We can now understand what Kant means by this. The moral argument builds from the fact of evil and it is through moral faith that one is able to persevere. More fully, we may understand the relationship between the moral argument and the problem of evil as follows:

1) Self-interest, natural evil, and injustice impact us such that it becomes more difficult to be moral.
2) Our moral perseverance and/or moral improvement depend upon overcoming hindrances to our resolve.
3) Belief in God helps us overcome these hindrances.
4) We therefore ought to believe in God.

In short: for Kant, the solution to the problem of evil is already "baked-into" faith, for it is in virtue of the evils we encounter in life and our need to overcome their threat to our moral resolve that we are to turn to religion. We will elaborate upon this somewhat further in the "Conclusion", but we may also take it as a testament to the sincerity of Job's faith that even when he, a man "perfect and upright" (Job 1:1) personally suffers, still does not curse God. That is, Job looks upon the injustice of his suffering as well as the annihilation of the happiness he until then enjoyed in life, and still holds fast to his faith.

6 Theodicy and the Highest Good

Before we turn to the "Conclusion", there are two doctrinal theodicies that require some further consideration. Both IIc and IIIc refer to a future existence where those who are morally worthy are rewarded with happiness. Hence, IIc and IIIc may be read to imply that the highest good gets swept up into doctrinal theodicy with the justice it offers serving to vindicate God for the evils of this world. Let us

---

Kant presents our "natural need" for happiness as a hindrance to moral resolve, and that "one of the inescapable limitations of human beings" is that we are concerned with the efficacy of our moral efforts (*Rel.* 6:7.20–1). Then, in "Part One", Kant provides an account of moral evil in such a way that we must turn to at least the hope for divine aid (*Rel.* 6:52.1–7), i.e., we cannot know if we are capable of undoing our evil disposition through our own powers, and as such, each person can hope that "what does not lie in his power will be compensated for by cooperation from above" (*Rel.* 6:52.6–7, my translation).

thus take a moment to further discuss them, for while Kant does not in either case explicitly mention the highest good, both nonetheless make reference to a future state where happiness and moral worth are aligned.

In IIc, Kant considers the theodicy where our current suffering is a "struggle with adversities" for the purposes of becoming "worthy of that future glory" (*Theodicy* 8:260.15–16). Hence, the evil of this life is justified as necessary for the purpose of moral growth, and that growth will then be rewarded with a "future happiness" (*Theodicy* 8:260.12). It thus seems that the doctrine of the highest good can be construed as a doctrinal theodicy.

Kant responds that this theodicy can be "granted [*vorgegeben*]" (*Theodicy* 8:260.21) but "in no way can there be insight into it" (*Theodicy* 8:260.22). He further writes that while through this theodicy "one can indeed cut the knot loose through an appeal to the highest wisdom," still "one cannot untie the knot, which is what theodicy claims to be capable of accomplishing" (*Theodicy* 8:260.22–5). I take this to mean that an authentic solution to theodicy is intimated by IIc, but insofar as the work of theoretical reason is to provide an explanatory system, a *theoretical* vindication which appeals to a "future happiness" would have to explain the processes by which our worldly "struggle with adversities" leads to one's becoming "worthy of that future glory" and how that future comes into being. That is, Kant here presupposes his restriction thesis such that because we can have no theoretical "insight into it," the "knot" is not yet untied.

The same can be said of IIIc. The doctrinal theodicist again seeks to justify human suffering by appeal to a "future world" of happiness, where "each will receive that which his deeds here below are worthy of according to moral judgment" (*Theodicy* 8:262.17–19). This clearly reflects his idea of the highest good, but when this idea is employed by theoretical reason, problems arise. In IIc, Kant's response was that theoretical reason cannot do its job in articulating a mechanism through which the moral circumstances of this world connect to moral circumstances in a "future world." In IIIc, he adds that should theoretical reason attempt to spell out this connection, it would have to do so "according to the laws of nature" (*Theodicy* 8:262.34), but in that regard, "there is absolutely no comprehensible relation between the inner grounds of determination of the will (namely the moral way of thinking) [...] and the (for the most part external) causes of our welfare independent of our will" (*Theodicy* 8:262.31–4). Put differently: theoretical reason is in itself without a basis to presume that there would be any more justice in a future life than what is found in this one. If theoretical reason can, at best, extrapolate from the laws of nature, it could not come to the conclusion needed; for however much we want ultimate justice, there "is just as little to be expected there as here" (*Theodicy* 8:262.37).

7 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to show that Kant's moral argument and practical reason's "authentic" response to the problem of evil are fundamentally connected: faith in God is the morally needed response to the evils of life. Thus, unlike the standard rendering of the problem of evil where the fact of evil is taken to be a threat to religious belief, for Kant, the fact of evil is what leads to religious belief.

However counterintuitive it is that the fact of evil is given as a reason for faith rather than a threat to it, this connection can be understood once we shift from theoretical arguments to the context of our practical lives: certainly, evil is not a premise for an argument or evidence that God exists; rather, we come to faith because otherwise our encounter with evil compromises our moral resolve.

Consider further that Kant does not merely argue for a wish, a hope, or an "as if" modeling of the world, but presses that for faith to do its work, for it to genuinely stave off despair, self-interest, and other moral hindrances, it must be "sincere" while at the same time is a commitment wholly separate from the "subtle reasoning" of theoretical reason. Faith is rather an assent made possible in light of the "the impotence of our reason" (*Theodicy* 8:267.20), for once it is understood that theoretical reason and the epistemic norms that otherwise (should) govern our assent have reached their limits, the "room for faith" is opened, room where those striving to be morally upright can make a "voluntary determination" (*CprR* 5:146.6–8) to believe in God.

But unlike those who would have this as a sort of self-trickery, Kant regards this determination as one that can and should be sincere. Perhaps Kant should have made this point more often, but in the *Theodicy* he is clear that sincerity "is the principal requirement in matters of faith" (*Theodicy* 8:267.24), for the point of faith is that it steels our moral resolve: the more complete our conviction, the more we have "moral certainty" that our fate is in God's hands, the more we can rise above despair and selfishness, and the more we can be certain that the aims or "whither" (*Rel.* 6:4.24) of our deeds do not come to naught.

This is not, therefore, a "belief" in God that is just a regulative principle in disguise, our moral ideals in an "imaginatively enhanced or pictorial form" (DiCenso 2012, 28), or some technical fictionalism.[20] Seen through the lens of authentic the-

---

20 Space does not allow me to discuss this issue in detail, but it should be clear that I read faith/ belief [*Glaube*] in Kant as an assent, a holding-to-be-true that the object of the assent obtains (or will obtain). Hence, despite "as if" interpretations of *Glaube* (and I do think there is a role elsewhere for "as if" commitments in Kant's philosophy of religion), (a) if one has faith that God exists, one holds-to-be-true that there is a God, i.e. one is committed to the being's "objective reality" (see

odicy, the moral argument becomes all the more clear that it is none of such substitutes for a genuine "holding-to-be-true" that there is a God (and an afterlife). To tell oneself that one believes in God when one truly does not, to play out within oneself this pretend game of "as if," is precisely what Kant decries at the end of his essay. Sincerity is what is needed and why there is an authentic theodicy. To tell oneself that one believes when one truly does not, "then such a person *lies.*" That lie, Kant further asserts, is not only "the most absurd (before a reader of hearts): it is also the most sinful, for it undermines the ground of every virtuous intention" (*Theodicy* 8:268.26–269.2). For given the motivational need for faith, it is a lie to oneself about how committed one truly is to morality.

References

Allison, Henry, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
Anderson-Gold, Sharon, *Unnecessary Evil: History and Moral Progress in the Philosophy of Immanuel Kant* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).
Chance, Brian/ Pasternack, Lawrence, "Rational Faith and the Pantheism Controversy: Kant's "Orientation" Essay and the Evolution of his Moral Argument," in *Essays on Kant and his German Contemporaries*, ed. by Daniel Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 195–214.
Chignell, Andrew, "Belief in Kant," *Philosophical Review* 116.3 (2007), 323–60.
DiCenso, James, *Kant's* Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: *A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
Fugate, Courtney D., *The Teleology of Reason* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).
Huxford, George, *Kant and Theodicy: A Search for an Answer to the Problem of Evil* (Landham, MD: Lexington, 2020).
Jay, Christopher, "The Kantian Moral Hazard Argument for Religious Fictionalism," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 75 (2014), 207–32.
Mercier, Brett/ Kramer, Stephanie/ Shariff, Azim, "Belief in God: Why People Believe, and Why They Don't," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 27 (2018), 263–8.

CprR 5:134.19–20, *CprR* 5:143.34, *CPJ* 5:469.7, *Prominent Tone* 20:299.2, etc.); (b) the "as if" Ersatzform of *Glaube* lacks the "moral-psychological" durability sufficient to meet our practical needs (I see this as an important implication of Kant's discussion of the sincerity of faith); and (c), *Glaube* interpreted in this way, does not violate the epistemic strictures of transcendental idealism. Kant's intent on this point is most famously conveyed, of course, at *CPR* B xxx (limits to knowledge, room for faith) but it is more thoroughly discussed in Section VII of Chapter Two of the *Critique of Practical Reason*'s "Dialectic", "How is it possible to think of an extension of pure reason for practical purposes without thereby also extending its cognition as speculative?" (*CprR* 5:134–41). Likewise, Kant's essay, "What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking" is also illuminating on this issue.

Pasternack, Lawrence, "The Development and Scope of Kantian Belief: The Highest Good, the Practical Postulates, and the Fact of Reason," *Kant-Studien* 102.3 (2011a), 290–315.

Pasternack, Lawrence, "Kant's Doctrinal Belief in God," *Rethinking Kant* 3 (2011b), 200–18.

Pasternack, Lawrence, "Restoring Kant's Conception of the Highest Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55.3 (2017), 435–68.

Sherkat, Darren, "Religious Socialization: Sources of Influence and Influences of Agency," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. by Michele Dillion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151–63.

Smith, Tom, "Beliefs about God across Time and Countries," *NORC at the University of Chicago*, 2012, retrieved from http://gss.norc.org/Documents/reports/cross-nationalreports/ Godissp.pdf.

Stevenson, Leslie, "Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge," *Kantian Review* 7 (2003), 72–100.

Vaihinger, Hans, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1911).

Stephen Palmquist
Reason's Need for God's Actual Existence in Kant's *Religion*

1 Does Reason Need an Actual God? Evil as an Existential Problem

Must the God of Kantian religion *actually* exist? Interpreters have long debated this question.[1] In the first *Critique*, Kant unambiguously affirms the *idea* of God as a useful hypothesis (*CPR* A 642–68/B 670–96); although he denies our ability both to apprehend God as an object of empirical cognition, separate from us human beings, and to achieve theoretical *certainty* that God actually exists (e.g., *CPR* A 614–20/B 642–8), the bare *idea* arises from the structure of human cognition itself (e.g., *CPR* A 333–4/B 390–1) and therefore serves, at the very least, as a heuristic fiction to assist us in constructing a systematically complete explanation of the world. But theist interpreters look in vain for incontrovertible evidence that Kant views this God-idea as corresponding to a real, existing being. Extending the evidence to include the second *Critique* does not conclusively resolve the dispute. Kant there takes our moral life to require any rational person to *postulate* God, to act *as if* a moral God exists, because otherwise obeying the moral law would be irrational in any situation that requires us to sacrifice our own happiness (*CprR* 5:124.4–132.5). Yet even this further affirmation of the important role God plays in Kant's philosophy leaves religiously skeptical interpreters free to claim that Kant advanced all of these arguments while still (secretly) denying God's ontological reality. Turning to the third *Critique*, where God becomes the focus of a "moral teleology" (*CPJ* 5:444.28–448.16), brings us no closer to resolving this debate, for nothing in Kant's arguments there *constrains* us to regard God, whose assumed purposeful relation to nature enables us to appreciate our own important role in the grand scheme of things (*CPJ* 5:429.25–436.2), as anything more than a Feuerbachian projection of human nature onto the transcendent realm of our ignorance.

Surprisingly, those who take sides in the aforementioned debate rarely draw substantive evidence from the one book where—if anywhere—one would expect to find unambiguous statements concerning God's existence: his ground-breaking

---

1 For example, Jacobi read Kant as an atheist (di Giovanni 2012, 25) and Wood (1991), as a deist.

Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason.[2] The purpose of this chapter will be to fill this lacuna in the literature by examining textual evidence from throughout *Religion* that offers insight into Kant's view of God's existence, giving special attention to two issues: (1) the modal status of belief in God (i.e., whether such belief entails a cognitive affirmation of something merely possible, or somehow actual, or fully necessary); and (2) whether the object of belief is a mere idea, or a being who really exists, independently of human subjects. I begin, in the remainder of this introductory section, by examining relevant passages in the two prefaces and in the "First Piece"—where Kant uses the word "God" only very occasionally (13 times, amounting to just 3.77% of total usage).[3] Each of the three subsequent sections then deals, respectively, with one of *Religion*'s other three main "pieces" (*Stücken*).

Kant begins the "Preface to the First Edition" by rehearsing his familiar moral argument for God's existence, concluding the otherwise familiar argument with a new twist:

> Ethics [*Moral*], therefore, leads inescapably to religion, through which it expands* to the idea of a reigning [*machthabenden*] moral lawgiver, outside the human being, in whose will the final purpose (of the world's creation) is that which at the same time can be, and ought to be, the final purpose of the human being. (*Rel.* 6:6.8–11)

On the word "expands" Kant adds a clarificatory footnote that spans three pages. Its key points can be summarized by quoting the beginning and end:

> The proposition: There is a God, hence there is a highest good in the world, if (as a proposition of faith) it is to emerge merely from ethics, is a synthetic a priori proposition that, even

---

2 Quotes from Kant's *Religion* are taken from my thoroughly revised version of Pluhar (2009), included throughout Palmquist (2016). Where I employ non-standard translations of Kant's technical terms, I insert the original German word in square brackets at the first quoted use.

3 Of the 345 times "God" (or related words, such as "God's", "godly", "godliness", etc.) occurs in *Religion*, just two (once as an adjective) occur in the two prefaces and 11 (once as an adjective) in the "First Piece" (all but one of these occurring in the concluding section); by contrast, the word occurs 46 times in the "Second Piece", 116 in the "Third Piece", and 170 in the "Fourth Piece". In the German original, "*Gott*" and its derivatives occur 348 times, including once in the prefaces, 11 times in the "First Piece", 41 in the "Second Piece", 121 in the "Third Piece", and 172 in the "Fourth Piece". So in the German text, only 3.45% of the word's total occurrences appear in the prefaces and "First Piece". Kant also refers to God using numerous other terms, such as forms of "supernatural" (40 times) and "divine" (121 times), but analyzing his usage of all such terms is unnecessary here, as this chapter is not meant to be a comprehensive word study. I cite the foregoing statistics mainly to show that Kant does not start talking about God until after §IV of the "First Piece".

though it is assumed only in a practical reference, still goes beyond the concept of duty that ethics contains (and that presupposes no matter, but merely formal laws, of volition) and therefore cannot be extricated from it analytically [...]. However, if the strictest observance of moral laws is to be thought as cause of the effectuation of the highest good (as purpose), then, since human capacity is not sufficient to bring about happiness in the world concordantly with the worthiness to be happy, an omnipotent moral being must be assumed as ruler of the world, under whose provisions this comes about, i. e., ethics leads inevitably to religion. (*Rel.* 6:6.14–19, 6:7.42, 6:8.33–7)

This passage makes four key claims about God that are either new or, at the very least, were not stated so explicitly in the second *Critique* version of Kant's moral argument. First, whereas the abstract, moral version of the God-concept, as affirmed in *CprR*, is merely *formal*, the ethico-religious version in *Religion* is *material.* As we shall see in Section 3, religion for Kant is a material (experienced) reality, not just a formal set of theoretical assertions. Second, when viewed in the material context of a living religion, with its attendant ethical norms, the status we assign to the affirmation of God's existence will have a "synthetic a priori" (*Rel.* 6:6.15–16) relation to our affirmation of the highest good; the two are not related analytically and thus cannot be reduced to (or proven through) a merely syllogistic argument. Third, the God that emerges, when we follow reason as it leads us from the formality of ethics to the materiality of religion, is a God whose existence needs to be (or at least, must be *conceived* as being) "outside the human being" (*Rel.* 6:6.9). Finally, the analytic relationship between ethics and the highest good explains why religion (and with it, the notion that God actually exists) "inescapably" (*Rel.* 6:6.8) or "*inevitably*" (*Rel.* 6:8.37) arises for anyone who seeks to follow ethical norms. Kant's use of these two carefully chosen terms indicates that religion presents us not with anything like a logically necessary God, but with a God whose existence is existentially present to any rational human being who tries to live an ethically good life.

Rather than unpacking the distinctive implications of this religiously tweaked version of his standard moral argument, Kant devotes the rest of the first "Preface" to a self-defensive account of why philosophers writing about religion should not be subjected to the government censorship that theologians must rightly endure when writing about religious matters. That Kant was thinking of his own situation is evidenced by various comments he makes about government involvement in religion, later in the book (e. g., *Rel.* 6:113.11–26, *Rel.* 6:133.8, 134.10, 34–7). In short, the book's four pieces were originally meant as a series of journal articles; but when the censor rejected the second piece (i. e., the second article), Kant turned the series into a book, which required some subtle, behind-the-scenes tactics in order to avoid the book version being further scrutinized by the censor.

Aside from *CPR*, *Religion* is the only book Kant ever bothered to publish in a significantly revised second edition. In addition to an entirely new "Preface", Kant added nearly 30 new footnotes and made about 200 revisions in the text, often just correcting typos, but sometimes adding phrases or changing words to clarify his intended meaning. I will occasionally call attention to such changes, where relevant. For now, though, I shall make just two brief points about the second edition. First, near the end of the "Preface to the Second Edition" Kant clarifies, in response to an anonymous book review of the first edition,[4] that he intentionally avoided using many of the technical terms employed in the *Critiques*, because "[t]o understand this work in terms of its essential content, only common ethics is needed, without venturing into the critique of pr[actical] reason, still less into that of theoretical reason" (*Rel.* 6:14.1–4). After mentioning a few terms he purposefully omitted in *Religion*, he adds: "the matter itself is contained, even if in different words, in the most popular instruction for children or in sermons and is readily understandable" (*Rel.* 6:14.14–15). Second, despite Kant's best efforts to clarify how his position is meant to promote the spread of authentic religion (i.e., of the moral-rational core of Christianity, properly understood), the government censor eventually *did* forbid Kant from publishing further on religious matters, a few months after the second edition's publication. What was so dangerous about Kant's claims in *Religion*, that it led the government to take such decisive action against him? We will come to that in the remaining three sections. But first let us look briefly at the "First Piece", the only one of the three original journal articles that passed the censor's scrutiny.

The "First Piece" mentions God only once prior to its concluding (fifth) section; its main aim is to define the *problem* whose *solution* will be the rational need to believe in an actual God and in at least the *possibility* of God's assistance in the task of becoming a good human being. In §I, Kant positions humanity between animals and God: our threefold "predisposition" entails that we participate in "animality", "humanity", and "personality" (*Rel.* 6:26.2–11); we must *choose* to make moral decisions on the basis of either the first or third aspect of our nature. Every human being thereby adopts one of two "convictions [*Gesinnungen*]":[5] either our animality (i.e., the sum-total of our sense-based "inclination") controls our humanity (i.e., our human "volition [*Willkür*]"), so that we follow the call of our personality (i.e., the "will [*Wille*]") only when convenient, or else our personality con-

---

4 For details of this review, including a complete English translation and an assessment of the (in)adequacy of Kant's responses to the reviewer's five main points, in the second edition of *Religion*, see Palmquist and Otterman (2013).

5 For a detailed justification of translating Kant's technical term, *Gesinnung*, as "conviction", see Palmquist (2015b).

trols our humanity, so that we satisfy our animal inclinations only when we can do so without contravening the moral law. These two choices characterize an evil- and a good-hearted person, respectively. Kant goes on to argue in §II–§III that, due to an "evil propensity" (*Rel.* 6:28.26–39.6) in human nature, we all find ourselves, at the outset of our moral pilgrimage, having chosen to give our animality precedence over our personality (i.e., over the divinity within us); he names this feature of the human situation "radical evil" (*Rel.* 6:19.5). The vexing question as to how Kant actually justifies this claim[6] can be side-stepped here, because it is not directly related to the role God plays in his religious system. What is more relevant is to note that, having (allegedly) established the presence of an evil propensity in human nature, and having distinguished that philosophical theory (in §IV) from the Christian doctrine of original sin, he concludes the "First Piece" in §V[7] by arguing that this tragic human situation calls for a radical change of heart. Indeed, how it is possible to restore personality to its proper place in human nature, as the grounding for a good moral conviction, is the key problem Kant aims to solve in the rest of *Religion.*

All but one of the "First Piece's" 11 uses of "God" occur in §V, the other being a passing reference to the Hindu god, *Shiva* (*Rel.* 6:19.17–18). Kant begins by emphasizing that, whatever help religion might offer in the task of restoring the original goodness of human nature to its rightful place in our heart, each human being "must make or have made *himself*" into a good (or evil) person, "for otherwise it could not be imputed to him" (*Rel.* 6:44.16–18). Kant openly concedes that, to explain how an evil person can become good, we may need "supernatural cooperation" (*Rel.* 6:44.25)—to which he raises no objection, as long as we preserve the human being's free will in choosing how to behave. Such assistance might "consist only in the diminution of obstacles or also in positive assistance" (*Rel.* 6:44.25–6); in either case, "the human being must yet make himself worthy beforehand to receive it, and must (which is no trifling matter) *accept* this aid, i.e., take up this positive increase of power into his maxim" in order for us "to impute the good to him and to cognize him as a good human being" (*Rel.* 6:44.26–31). Here Kant advances three claims that lay the groundwork for what I have called the special "religious

---

6 The status of Kant's argument regarding our original evil state has been a matter of much debate among interpreters. For a summary of the main positions and a suggested solution, claiming (contrary to other readings) that Kant's text itself outlines an argument for evil, see Palmquist (2008).
7 The section labeled §V in the journal article version of the "First Piece" and in the first edition of *Religion* was renamed "General Comment" in the second edition. For an explanation of this change, suggesting it could have resulted from a printer's error, and for an explanation of why the original section headings are preferable to the second edition's, see Palmquist (2016, 120, 144–5).

argument for God's existence"[8] that pervades the text of *Religion* and (as we shall see in §3, below) reaches its climax in the early sections of the "Third Piece": (1) reason recognizes a real need for assistance, to compensate for the weakness we experience when facing the human situation; (2) however religion might offer supplements, in hopes of empowering us to become morally good, such assistance must not be interpreted in ways that take away the individual's moral responsibility; (3) if the religious person experiences divine assistance, this should therefore be interpreted as a form of *cooperation*, rather than as God completely overtaking the human will; and (4) divine assistance might come either negatively (e. g., by removing temptations that a person could not resist) or positively (e. g., by providing an example of a human being actually resisting evil and becoming good).

Kant devotes the bulk of §V to considering whether we should view such a change of heart as occurring through a sudden (timeless, intellectual) "revolution" in one's conviction or through a gradual (temporal, sensible) "reform" (*Rel.* 6:47.18–26) in what he often calls our "lifestyle [*Lebenswandels*]" (e. g., *Rel.* 6:51.15). His answer is typically perspectival: since God alone is a being "who fathoms the intelligible basis of the heart ([i. e.,] of all maxims of volition)" (*Rel.* 6:48.8–9), only a timeless *revolution* in the human being's conviction can render a person *morally* (as opposed to being merely *legally*) good, and thus "satisfactory [*wohlgefällig*] to God" (*Rel.* 6:47.18–28); given that "the human being is fundamentally corrupted in his maxims", it seems impossible to conceive of how "to bring about this revolution through his own powers and to become on his own a good human being" (*Rel.* 6:47.29–31). When assessing our own moral state, we therefore have no choice but to look for gradual reform as *evidence* that the revolution has taken place. That is, from the intellectual standpoint of one's inner conviction, which God alone can see, a human being can attain "holiness [...] through a kind of rebirth, as if through a new creation" (*Rel.* 6:47.25–7), even though from our own limited, sensible standpoint, whereby we see our daily choices and actions only in terms of *virtue*, the human being "deems himself to be on the good (though narrow) path of constant *progress* from the bad to the better" (*Rel.* 6:48.6–8). This dual perspective suffices to explain how we can restore the good predisposition, despite having started out with an evil propensity: only if and insofar as a progressing person affirms the existence of a timeless God, "for whom this infinity of progress is [...] a unity", can the progressing person really be "a human being who is good (pleasing to [God])" (*Rel.* 6:48.8–11).

---

8 I examine the structure of this argument and defend its validity in Palmquist (2009); for a briefer account, see Palmquist (2000/2019, 167–8).

The foregoing is Kant's perspectival answer to the fundamental question: How can a human being whose basic nature is good, but who has freely chosen to be guided by evil, become good again? Does this answer require that a *real* God must exist, outside of us? Not at this stage of his argument. Throughout §V of the "First Piece" Kant carefully writes in hypothetical terms: reason needs to assume such a God exists, *if* we are to explain to ourselves how a change of heart is possible; and since evil-hearted persons have a duty to enact such a revolutionary change, anyone who wants to be morally good is well-advised to believe God exists. Kant takes great care to warn against the temptation to use this God-hypothesis as an excuse for moral laziness: the view that God can save a person "without his exactly needing *to become a better human being*" or "that *God* presumably can *make him a better human being* without his having to do anything more in this than to *beg* for it" are examples of illusory religious wish-fulfilment (*Rel.* 6:51.28–37). In place of such illusions, Kant does not leave human beings to do everything on their own, as some interpreters (e. g., McCarthy 1986, 76–8; DiCenso 2012, 71–89) suggest; rather, his alternative is that salvation must be a *cooperative* effort: "only if [...] he has employed his original predisposition to the good in order to become a better human being, can he hope that what is not in his capacity will be complemented by a higher [being's] cooperation" (*Rel.* 6:52.3–7).

Far from offering anything close to a *proof* of God's existence, the main text of the "First Piece" ends by insisting that the rational person has no need for such a proof: we can be morally empowered by a belief that divine assistance *really is* available without claiming to know *how* such assistance actually comes about;[9] moreover, claiming to possess such knowledge puts religious persons at risk of failing to take hold of whatever assistance God has to offer, by willfully ignoring what is not only possible but "is necessary for everyone to know, *what the human being himself has to do* in order to become worthy of this assistance" (*Rel.* 6:52.12–15). However, Kant's empathy for those who desire rational evidence that an actual God really exists does not stop here.

---

9 By saying this Kant does not mean divine revelation is impossible, but that no human being can rightfully claim exclusive possession of such revelation. For he adds: "perhaps it is even unavoidable that, if the way in which [divine cooperation] occurs were at a certain time revealed, different human beings at another time would frame different concepts of it, and this with all sincerity" (*Rel.* 6:52.8–11).

2 The Need for Moral Empowerment: Can Belief in a God-Man Solve the Problem?

What exactly is it that Kant thinks "everyone" can *know* about what human beings must "*do* in order to become worthy of [God's] assistance" (*Rel.* 6:52.12–15)? Kant does not keep his reader guessing for long. After an untitled introductory section (*Rel.* 6:57.1–60.4) that criticizes the Stoics for blaming human evil on the inclinations, rather than rooting it in an erroneous use of reason, Kant emphasizes in the first sentence of "Section One" (subsection "A") of the "Second Piece" that humanity's "*complete moral perfection*" is the *only* thing that "can make a world the object of divine decree and the purpose of creation" (*Rel.* 6:60.9–12). But if human nature is radically evil, how is this ideal of perfect humanity *possible?* Kant answers this (implied) question with a string of (paraphrased) quotes from the *New Testament:*

> This human being, alone satisfactory to God, "is in God from eternity" [John 1:2; see also. 1 John 1:2b]; the idea of him emanates from God's essence; he is to that extent not a created thing but God's only begotten Son, "the *Word* (the Become!) through which all other things are, and without which nothing exists that has been made" [John 1:1a, 3]. (*Rel.* 6:60.14–20)

Kant's point here seems to be that the rational need for moral perfection is the best evidence that God is not merely possible (as assumed throughout §V of the "First Piece") but *actual.* In other words, as he goes on to suggest in the (difficult but crucial) second paragraph of subsection "A", our need to view the purpose of morality (i. e., the highest good, moral perfection resulting in happiness) as capable of fulfilment gives us an existential reason to affirm the real existence of a divine power, a power that manifests itself as the "archetype" or idea of a God-man that religion presents to us:

> Now, to *elevate* ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i. e., to the archetype of moral conviction [*Gesinnung*] in all its integrity [*Lauterkeit*], is a universal human duty; and this idea itself, which reason puts before us for emulation, can give us power for this. However, precisely because we are not the idea's authors but it has taken its place in the human being without our grasping how human nature could have been so much as receptive to it, one can do better by saying that this archetype has *come down* to us from heaven, that it has assumed humanity (for it is not equally possible to envision how the *human being, evil* by nature, would on his own cast off evil and *elevate* himself to the ideal of holiness, as it is that this ideal would assume *humanity*—which by itself is not evil—and *lower* itself to it). (*Rel.* 6:61.3–15)

This tightly packed paragraph, taken together with Kant's previous claims in the "First Piece" and his subsequent claim that we must have "*practical faith in this Son of God*" (*Rel.* 6:62.1), constitutes what might be called an initial, "existential" argument for God's existence, which we can reconstruct as follows:

1. *Predisposition to good:* Human beings have a universal duty to fulfil the purpose of our moral predisposition by adopting a good conviction (i. e., by being perfect).
2. *Evil propensity:* Human beings have an innate weakness that corrupts the will, causing us to start our moral development by adopting an evil conviction (i. e., by becoming imperfect).
3. *Ought implies can:* Whenever *p* is a duty, *p* must be possible.[10]
4. *Archetype:* Religion claims that God has become a perfect human being, and reason recognizes this through its awareness of the idea of moral perfection.
5. *Practical faith:* By believing (4.), human beings can overcome (2.) and thus be empowered to fulfil their moral purpose by recovering (1.).

This argument is the key to what I have elsewhere described as Kant's claim in *Religion* that reason calls us not to reduce religion to morality, but to *raise* morality to the level of religion (see Palmquist 1992, esp. 148). Whereas Kant's moral writings primarily aim to define the absolute strictness of the moral demand, *Religion* aims to explain how weak human beings can satisfy this demand. Kant's initial answer, in the "Second Piece" of *Religion*, is that we cannot do so without *some* measure of divine assistance. Although reason can tell us nothing about *how* such assistance happens (and therefore Kant, writing as a philosopher, never mentions Jesus by name), it does tell us that it *must* have happened, if our moral duty is to make sense. This leaves open the possibility that morality is a sham; but for anyone who refuses to believe in God's assistance yet persists in thinking that we should try to be good (rather than just intentionally living a life of self-gratification), the human situation is rendered absurd.

Like Kant's standard moral argument for God's existence, this existential version does not definitively *prove* God's existence; but it intensifies the former by requiring anyone who accepts the moral argument's reasoning to believe that "God" refers not just to the *idea* of a being whose existence is *possible*, but to an *actual* divine being who is somehow capable of entering into a *cooperative* relationship with human beings. It is in the context of this focus on cooperation between human beings and God that Kant warns in subsection "B" that, for one who accepts

---

10 *Rel.* 6:62.14. Kant merely presupposes this basic moral principle throughout *Religion*. See also *Rel.* 6:37.8–17, *Rel.* 6:41.8–25, *Rel.* 6:45.7–9, *Rel.* 6:47.29–36.

the conclusion of the foregoing argument by putting practical faith in the archetype of perfect humanity, "no example from experience is needed to make the idea of a human being morally satisfactory to God a prototype for us" (*Rel.* 6:62.28–30). He says this not to downplay the legitimacy of Christians' belief in Jesus' salvific work, but to discourage the temptation many religious people have to rely so heavily on their religious hero that they lose all motivation to treat Jesus (or Abraham, Buddha, etc.) as an *example* but instead believe that salvation is a matter of God alone miraculously changing one's moral character. The latter way of believing in an archetype would not be *practical* belief (which interprets the archetype as *assisting* us in making a real change in our moral character) but *theoretical* belief (which interprets the archetype as *making* the required change *for us*). Thus, as argued more fully in Palmquist (2012), Kant devotes the bulk of subsection "B" to explaining how Christians can legitimately regard Jesus as God's Son: as long as one does not lose sight of Jesus' humanity, he can be affirmed as "a truly divinely minded human being" (*Rel.* 6:63.22), one in whom "the ideal of the good [was] exhibited bodily" (*Rel.* 6:65.2–3). In affirming Jesus' divinity, Kant contends, Christians must do so in a way that preserves the cooperative relationship between God and humanity; by "speaking only of the conviction, which he himself makes the rule of his actions" (*Rel.* 6:66.1–2), we avoid the pitfall of ascribing to Jesus a divine status that prevents him from being an effectively motivating example. In affirming that a divine archetype resides in human reason and serves as the key to establishing God's real existence, Kant is not denying the traditional doctrine of the hypostatic union but is providing a way for Christians to interpret it without deluding themselves by thinking Christ will save them without they themselves *following* Christ's example.

Subsection "C" continues this emphasis on moral motivation by raising and proposing solutions to three theological "difficulties" (*Rel.* 6:66.19) that arise for anyone who believes in divine assistance. As I have argued elsewhere,[11] Kant's emphasis in discussing each difficulty is not on defending any specific theological stance regarding how divine assistance occurs, but only to argue how religious believers should *interpret* such assistance, in order to avoid the ever-present danger of allowing theological doctrines to ruin their moral character. Rather than discussing Kant's suggestions as to how one can solve the three difficulties ethically, I will here merely list them and explain their general relevance to the question of how Kant views the status of God's existence in *Religion.* The difficulties arise directly

---

[11] For a detailed defense and explanation of the claim that Kant's emphasis in subsection "C" is not on a *theology* of grace but on guarding against religious delusions that lead to moral laziness, see Palmquist (2010 and 2016, 179–214).

out of the traditional theological doctrines typically called *sanctification* (how a person can become *holy*, after conversion), *eternal security* (whether a person can lose salvation, once converted), and *justification* (how God can justifiably forgive the evil a person does before being converted). Kant's solutions to all three difficulties appeal in one way or another to *grace*, which he defines (in a second edition footnote) as "the decree of a superior to bestow a good for which the subordinate has nothing but the (moral) receptivity" (*Rel.* 6:75.39–41). The footnote clarifies that such "*receptivity* [...] is all that we [...] can attribute to ourselves" (*Rel.* 6:75.38–9). In other words, far from defending a works-oriented view of salvation, Kantian religion portrays salvation as a divine gift that is not ultimately under our control.[12] Accordingly, the sentence of the main text to which the footnote is attached, calls attention to the possibility

> that what, in our case, in life on earth (perhaps also in all future times and in all worlds) is always only in the [state of] bare *becoming* (namely, to be a human being satisfactory to God) should thereby be imputed to us as if we were already in full possession of it here—to this [...] we surely have (according to empirical self-cognition) no legal claim. (*Rel.* 6:75.3–8)

Acknowledging the inevitability of human imperfection, reason must humbly admit to being dependent on the real existence of an actual God, for a mere idea or postulate could never close the gap between our perpetual state of *becoming* and the moral law's demand for *being* good.

"Section Two" of the "Second Piece" turns from the paucity of the philosopher's legal claim to assert any right to receive God's grace to an account of the Bible's special revelation. Here Kant's strategy changes markedly: instead of continuing his task of constructing a systematic philosophical account of how religion overcomes evil, he interprets the biblical account symbolically, in terms of the struggle between Christ and Satan.[13] Near the end of "Section Two", Kant explains

---

12 Kant is often accused of defending what Christians sometimes call "salvation by works" (e. g., Miller 2015, 11–12). Palmquist (2007) argues that this is an unfortunate misreading of *Religion*, as Kantian religion requires us to admit our ignorance of God's salvific plan. Kant's emphasis on continual self-improvement is aimed at giving "goodly-minded [*Wohlgesinnte*]" persons (*Rel.* 6:81.10, *Rel.* 6:93.4, *Rel.* 6:98.1, *Rel.* 6:101.4) a genuine, rational basis for *hope* of salvation, but such hope never attains the status of certain knowledge. Kant's God is always sovereign. Indeed, numerous passages in *Religion* explicitly reject salvation by works, one of the most explicit being: "Everyone can through his reason convince himself [...] of the impossibility of ever considering oneself justified before God by one's lifestyle and nonetheless of the necessity of such a righteousness valid before God" (*Rel.* 6:163.29–35).

13 For an excellent analysis of "Section Two" and its appeal to a medieval theological tradition of interpreting the way salvation operates, see Chignell (2010).

that his aim in this relatively short section has been "to search in Scripture for that specific sense that stands in harmony with the *holiest* teaching of reason" (*Rel.* 6:83.35–7). This remark is not a bold attempt to portray reason as holier than scripture, but a concrete application of Kant's own fundamental principle, that authentic religion involves a genuine *partnership* between human beings and God. Kant's symbolic interpretation of Christ and the Devil brings out this feature of Kant's emphasis by portraying Christ as the personification of the good principle and the Devil as that of the evil principle. As such, the biblical narrative effectively fills in various gaps that philosophical argument alone could never demonstrate. Most notably, it reassures believers that, just as Jesus managed to attain victory over the evil propensity and to restore the good predisposition to its proper place, so also all believers now have legitimate grounds to hope that the same applies to everyone.

3 *Must* God Actually Exist? The Church as a Divinely Guided Community

Recent interpreters of Kant's *Religion* generally agree that the book's argument shifts significantly at its midpoint: whereas the "First" and "Second Pieces" focused on explaining human nature's mechanism for understanding how religion arises in *individual* human beings, who each put practical faith in the divinely given archetype of perfect humanity in hopes of revolutionizing our moral conviction through the resulting divine–human cooperation, the "Third" and "Fourth Pieces" focus on the need for human beings to cooperate not only with God but with *each other*, by joining together in a community of good-hearted persons who work together to keep humanity on the right path.[14] The argument of the "Third Piece" proceeds by first pointing out, in the untitled introduction, that when good-hearted individuals find themselves in the presence of other people—even other *good-hearted* people—all sorts of evil tendencies resurface. In section "I" of "Division One" of the "Third Piece", borrowing from Hobbes' political theory, Kant dubs this "the ethical state of nature" (*Rel.* 6:95.11), wherein each person attends only to what he or she considers good and does not bother to take into account the common good. Just as Hobbes had argued that the political state of nature gives rise to

---

14 See Palmquist (2000/2019, 132–3, 145–6, 150, 208); see also Despland (1973, 203), and Michalson (1979, 120). More recently, Pasternack (2014, 8–9, 216), makes the same observation, arguing further that the four "Pieces" follow a chiastic ("ABBA") pattern—a pattern virtually identical to the one shown in Figure VII.2 of Palmquist (2000/2019).

perpetual war and that the only solution is to create a political community (i.e., a juridical civil state), Kant argues that the ethical state of nature must be transformed into an "ethical community" (*Rel.* 6:94.26–35).

Against this backdrop, section "II" of "Division One" sets forth what I have elsewhere called a special, "religious argument for the existence of God" (Palmquist 2009, 3, 19, 22). Rather than reproducing all of the detailed textual evidence for the presence of such an argument in that section, I shall here merely quote the argument's main steps (Palmquist 2009, 14–15):

1. The human species has a special, collective duty to itself, to promote its highest good among all human beings.
2. This special duty must establish a purely ethical community by systematically uniting the self-legislation of each person who pursues (however imperfectly) the ideal of his or her own moral perfection.
3. This special duty is unique: we do not know how it would be possible for individual humans on their own to work toward fulfilling it, though we do know the species as a whole ought to (and therefore can) fulfill it.
4. Therefore (in view of our ignorance), reason needs to presuppose the idea of a higher moral being who can complete the work human individuals cannot reasonably hope to accomplish on their own in fulfilling this special duty of the human species to itself.

Palmquist (2009, 11–17) shows how each of the above four main steps in Kant's argument is itself the conclusion of a further syllogism. Limitations of space prevent me from repeating or even summarizing the whole argument here. Instead, suffice it to say that at this crucial mid-point in Kant's analysis of the nature and function of religion, he acknowledges the importance of establishing reason's need for a God who is more than just a theoretical idea or practical postulate: the God of religion, as already argued in the "Second Piece", must not only exist but must be able to appear in human form, as an archetypal God-man, if belief in God is to empower human beings to become good.

Sections "III" and "IV" of "Division One" go on to argue that, since the ethical community can succeed in uniting human beings under the idea of the good principle *only* if its members jointly recognize the presence within them of a God who commands the moral law, the ethical community is properly regarded as a "people of God" under laws of virtue, commonly known as a "*church*" (*Rel.* 6:100.19–20). What other interpreters routinely ignore is that, starting from section "IV", Kant uses the term "ethical community" only a handful of times for the rest of the book, preferring "church" instead. Thus, section "IV" explicitly distinguishes the respective roles of God and human beings as we cooperate to build the church. Kant writes:

> Founding a moral people of God is [...] a work whose execution can be expected not from human beings but only from God himself. However, the human being is still not permitted, on that account, to be inactive in regard to this task and to let providence reign, as if each person might pursue only his moral private concern but leave the whole of the concern of the human race (in terms of its moral predetermination [*Bestimmung*]) to a higher wisdom. He must, on the contrary, proceed in such a way as if everything came down to him, and only on this condition may he hope that a higher wisdom will bestow completion upon his well-intentioned effort. (*Rel.* 6:100.29–101.3)

This passage offers clear evidence that, at least when it comes to religion, Kant's God is not only real but a crucial, active member of the partnership that constitutes genuine religion. Without God's real existence, our human efforts to be good would be bound to fail before even getting started; yet, by contrast, if we assume (as some versions of Christian doctrine teach) that God has done *everything*, such that we human beings play no role in the process of moral regeneration, then the church is bound to fail in its ultimate task of rendering humanity "satisfactory to God".[15]

After distinguishing in section "IV" between the "invisible church" (consisting of all persons who have a good conviction, as known only by God) and the "visible church" (consisting of the people who together form a particular religious community) (*Rel.* 6:101.7–23), Kant presents four basic guidelines that we should follow, in building visible churches that emulate the invisible (archetypal) model. As we might expect, given Kant's love of architectonic reasoning, he relates these four "requirements" (*Rel.* 6:101.25) directly to the four category headings employed in *CPR* and throughout his Critical writings:

1. *Quantity:* universality. The true church is *one*.
2. *Quality:* integrity (*Lauterkeit*). The church aims solely at its members' *moral edification*.
3. *Relation:* freedom. Church members must be free from coercion, both (a) internally (i. e., members will not try to control each other) and (b) externally (i. e., the church and political state will operate independently).
4. *Modality:* unchangeability. The church's constitution is (a) *necessary*, in the sense that these four basic precepts will *never* change, while also being (b) *possible*, in the sense that all *other* aspects of church governance are *always* open to change.

---

15 Kant uses this phrase 31 times in *Religion*. In Palmquist (2000/2019, 130–1, 178–87, 239, 271, 511), I interpret "humanity well-pleasing [*wohlgefällig*] to God" as the ultimate goal of Kant's system of religion. Significantly, this phrase occurs 50 times in *Religion*, with various similar phrases also occurring frequently.

Numerous concrete guidelines can be gleaned from these four requirements, if religious interpreters of Kant take them seriously,[16] especially once we realize that each of the next four sections (i.e., sections "V", "VI", and "VII" of "Division One", and "Division Two") expands, respectively, on one of these four guidelines.

Surveying the main content of these final four sections of the "Third Piece", with their various guidelines on how to construct a visible church that will be an authentic "representative" of the invisible church (*Rel.* 6:101.16–17; see note 16), we can detect several key features of Kant's view of God. First and foremost, Kant's God is author of the "divine moral legislation" that governs each member of the true church (*Rel.* 6:101.7).[17] Section "V" contrasts this with the notion that God legislates "*merely statutory* […] laws" (*Rel.* 6:104.4). This term describes how "historical faiths" typically view God and divine laws,[18] but Kant warns that such "*liturgical* [*gottesdienstlichen*] religion" (*Rel.* 6:103.34–5) risks perverting the church's true purpose by tending to leave its members unmotivated to work on their own moral self-improvement. (As this is the main topic of the "Fourth Piece", we shall discuss it further in §4, below.) Only belief in a God who legislates morally is fully compatible with the first precept of the true church, universality, for with moral laws,

> everyone can from himself cognize, through his own reason, the will of God that lies at the basis of his religion; for the concept of the deity actually arises only from the consciousness of these laws and the need of reason to accept a potentate [*eine Macht*] that can procure for them the entire effect, possible in a world, that concurs with the final moral purpose. (*Rel.* 6:104.5–10)

Kant goes on to identify "the matter of the veneration of God" as "the observance, occurring in a moral conviction, of all duties as his commands" (*Rel.* 6:105.12–14). Once again we see Kant emphasizing quite explicitly in the foregoing passage that reason needs a *real*, experiential God, one who possesses the potency to cooperate with us in achieving our highest moral good. As we shall see, this is not *incompatible* with a God who also reveals specific non-moral statutes; but "aware-

---

16 I discuss how to use these guidelines to formulate concrete policies for real, empirical churches in several publications, including Palmquist (2017, 87–91, and 2020, 95–113); see also Palmquist (1994). Summarizing such details here is beyond the scope of this chapter.

17 See also *Rel.* 6:142.22–36, *Rel.* 6:152.32–3, and *Rel.* 157.19–20.

18 Indeed, Kant concedes at *Rel.* 6:99.21–100.8 that one may conceive of a "people of God" as being under *statutory* laws, rather than moral laws. But such a God-concept risks portraying divine law-giving as political (and thus coercive), as in Jewish "theocracy" (*Rel.* 6:79.19, *Rel.* 6:99.25, *Rel.* 6:125.32). For a detailed discussion of Kant's claim in section "V", that some historical faith (and some revealed, statutory law) is nevertheless necessary for *prudential* reasons, see Palmquist (2015a).

ness of these [non-moral] laws is possible not through our own bare reason but only through revelation" (*Rel.* 6:104.13–16), so revealed statutes alone cannot fulfill the first precept of the true church, its universal applicability to all people.

Sections "VI" and "VII" appeal directly to the kind of churches that adopt a particular scripture as their divinely inspired guide for faith and that construct doctrinal statutes based on it. In short, section "VI" argues that such a church must prioritize the importance of *moral* interpretations of its revealed scripture over non-moral ones, just as Kant's second guideline for the true church requires. Likewise, section "VII" argues that church doctrines regarding salvation must be interpreted in a way that leaves its members free to decide for themselves how to resolve what Kant calls "a remarkable antinomy of human reason with itself" relating to any doctrine of "sanctifying [*seligmachende*] faith" (*Rel.* 6:116.20–4)— i. e., whether God's grace must precede our ability to do good, or whether our efforts to do good must precede our worthiness to receive God's grace. The third precept requires just such freedom *between* members of a church: they can agree not to coerce each other even on doctrinal issues, because both sides of this theoretically unresolvable antinomy *amount to the same thing* for anyone who has genuinely experienced a change of heart.[19] This should be supplemented by the church administration's commitment to resist the temptation to achieve universality by means of external (political) coercion: if visible churches that hold fast to a particular historical revelation want to assist in the historical process through which the "kingdom of God" will become a reality "on earth",[20] they must avoid proudly portraying their revealed statutes and historical traditions as if they can "become a universal [political regime]"; for when a church imposes unity by political coercion, "once it has proliferated and becomes dominant, there soon shows up a principle of disintegration and separation into different sects" (*Rel.* 6:123.32–5). This fate can be avoided, however, by the church that nurtures freedom, which "is the work—unnoticed by human eyes but progressing constantly—of the good principle, of establishing for itself, in the human race as a community according to

---

19 Thus Kant writes that to employ "the maxim of doing would be to cut the knot [of the antinomy] (by means of a practical maxim)—instead of disentangling it (theoretically)" (*Rel.* 6:119.3–4). He continues: "in the appearance of the God-man, the actual object of the sanctifying faith is not that about him which strikes the senses or can be cognized through experience, but the archetype that lies in our reason [and] that we lay at the basis of the God-man (because, as far as can be perceived from his example, he is adjudged to be in accordance with it); and such a faith is one and the same with the principle of a lifestyle satisfactory to God" (*Rel.* 6:119.17–23). For a defense of my interpretation of this passage, see Palmquist (2016, 312–14).
20 Kant makes this claim in the title of the "Third Piece" (*Rel.* 6:93.3) and repeats it several times thereafter (see *Rel.* 6:95.9, *Rel.* 6:101.24, *Rel.* 6:131.37, and *Rel.* 6:134.19, 26).

laws of virtue, a potency and a kingdom that maintains the victory over evil and that [...] assures the world of an eternal peace" (*Rel.* 6:124.1–5).

When Kant writes in this way, about divine *legislation* of moral laws and about God's *kingdom* coming to earth as we human partners gradually learn to do our part in that process, he would be making a mockery of his entire theory if he did not sincerely regard this God (though not observable by human senses and not provable by human reason) as being every bit as real as the objects that *do* appear to our senses and the truths that *can* be proved by logical reasoning. Thus, he concludes the "Third Piece" by presenting, in "Division Two", a historical overview of actual church faiths, comparing each example "in regard to its multiple and changeable form with the sole, unchangeable, pure religious faith" (*Rel.* 6:124.13–16). His "narrative of the constant struggle between the liturgical religious faith and the moral religious faith" for primacy of place in particular church traditions (*Rel.* 6:124.23–4) concerns the *fourth* categorial precept listed in section "IV" of "Division One". "Division Two" first re-examines Judaism, noting that simply invoking "the name of God [...] does not make it into a religious structure", because God "is here being venerated merely as a secular regent who makes no claim at all concerning and upon conscience" (*Rel.* 6:125.34–6). He then assesses the problems encountered by historical manifestations of the Christian church, which in many cases fared no better in the task of holding fast to the basic requirements of the invisible church. Such insistence that all external religious structures must be changeable demonstrates that, as we shall discover even more explicitly in the next section, Kant's God, though in some (for us limited human beings, *unknowable*) sense outside of us, is *manifested* to us as an *inward* reality, not as a being who usurps (or helps us usurp) political power.

4 How Does God Want To Be Served? Conscience as the Divine Guide

The "Fourth Piece" culminates Kant's portrayal of authentic religion by offering a detailed defense of his claim, previously introduced in the "Third Piece" ("Division One", section "V"), that God wants to be served first and foremost through virtuous behavior, rather than through divine worship. The untitled introduction starts with an overview of the foregoing theory of religion, carefully reiterating the partnership's basic terms: "God himself must be the author of his kingdom [...]. God himself as founder is the author of the *constitution*, but human beings as members and free citizens of this kingdom are yet in all cases the authors of the *organization*" (*Rel.* 6:152.12, 19–22).

Such a partnership is feasible only if God and human beings can somehow *communicate*—a claim Kant explicitly affirms, acknowledging that such communication must occur either through reason (leading to natural religion) or through revelation (leading to supernatural religion). For this, the typical visible church appeals to its revealed scripture and priests; by contrast, "the invisible church" has *no* "officials"; "each member of the community receives his orders immediately from the highest lawgiver" (*Rel.* 6:152.30–2).[21] The members Kant has in mind consist of "all well-meaning human beings", who are "*servants* (though without their being *officials*)" (*Rel.* 6:152.36–7). While Kant is widely regarded as a philosopher with no interest in religious experience, and he certainly never formulated a "proof from religious experience" *as such*, I shall argue in the remainder of this chapter that his portrayal of God throughout *Religion* (especially in the "Fourth Piece" and in the four "General Comments" appended to each "Piece") constitutes conclusive evidence that he affirms experience of God (through our immediate awareness of human duties) as the ultimate rationale for believing God actually exists.

Like the "Second" and "Third Pieces", the "Fourth Piece" is divided into two main parts. "Part One" begins with another untitled introduction that first defines "[r]eligion (regarded subjectively)" as "the cognition of all our duties as divine commands" (*Rel.* 6:153.28–9). Whereas "*revealed* religion" views every divine command as a duty, "*natural religion*" views every duty as a divine command (*Rel.* 6:154.1–5). In either case, Kant assumes that the religious person receives commands directly from God and that, as reiterated throughout the book, *only* religious believers can be both rational and good. To guard against "the repeatedly heard battle cry of hypocritical and power-lusting priestlings" (*Rel.* 6:154.36–7), however, Kant insists in a lengthy footnote that "a universal religion" will have "no special duties toward God [...]; for God cannot receive anything from us; we cannot act upon him or for him" (*Rel.* 6:154.24–6). Kant is not here identifying revelation (and so also, visible churches and the church faith directed to them) with false religion, for this would contradict many of his claims in the "Third Piece" (especially sections "V"–"VII" of "Division One"), where he portrays church faith as *necessary* to the successful propagation of rational religion. Perhaps to clarify his openness to revelation, he defines the "pure rationalist" as one who "does indeed allow this real revelation but asserts that being aware of it and accepting it as real are not necessarily required for religion" (*Rel.* 6:154.9, 155.1–2). This is fully consistent with Kant's Critical principles, whereby we must admit our theoretical ignorance, not

---

21 Kant likewise calls God "the lawgiver of all duties" at *Rel.* 6:160.27–8. Altogether he calls God "lawgiver" 24 times in *Religion*.

only of how God works but even of whether God actually exists. Critical humility requires only what Kant calls "[t]he *minimum* of cognition (that it is possible that there is a God)" in order for a person to comply with the demands of duty (*Rel.* 6:154.16–18). No doubt, this is why Kant devotes no effort, throughout *Religion*, to setting out *formal arguments* for God's existence.[22] The arguments identified in this chapter are *implicit* in Kant's text; at best, they set forth Kant's *reasons for believing* God is real, not formal arguments that would constrain others to affirm the same.

In the "Fourth Piece", "Part One", entitled "On the Service of God in a Religion Generally" (*Rel.* 6:153.27), has two subjections, both examining "The Christian Religion"—first "as a Natural Religion" (*Rel.* 6:157.16), then "as a Scholarly Religion" (*Rel.* 6:163.9). Surprisingly, "Section One" ends up being Kant's moral interpretation of the *New Testament:* drawing mainly from Matthew's Gospel, he locates so many similarities between Jesus' ethical and religious teachings and the theories defended throughout *Religion* that he begins the last paragraph by exclaiming: "Here, then, is a complete religion that can be submitted to all human beings through their own reason comprehensibly and convincingly" (*Rel.* 6:162.14–15). As such, Jesus "can be venerated as the *founder*, not indeed of the *religion* that, pure of all ordinances, is written in the heart of every human being [...], yet of the first true *church*" (*Rel.* 6:159.1–4). Whereas "Section One" focuses on the *status* of a religion (i. e., whether it is natural or revealed), demonstrating that, as illustrated by the *New Testament*, a Scripture can be *both*, "Section Two" mainly concerns the issue of how religions are *spread.* Once again, Kant concedes that, even in the case of Christianity (which he earlier called the *only* moral religion [*Rel.* 6:51.37–52.1]), what it *rightly* requires of its members is not only "the service that is due to [the church] according to the practical and moral faith of reason", but also "the service that must be rendered to the church according to the historical faith" (*Rel.* 6:164.4–7). For the latter, he concedes, scholarship is useful and necessary, even though the officials may be unable to provide adequate theoretical grounds for their church faith (*Rel.* 6:164.14). Nevertheless, grounding church faith on theoretical scholarship causes two problems. First, elements of historical faith are then made into *duties* that the members must follow *as if* they were moral laws, even though they are not. Second, even if a particular church resists this first temptation (which Kant decries as "pseudoservice" in "Part Two"), scholarly based religion would be

---

22 Moreover, by "cognition" in the foregoing quote, Kant surely means only *theoretical* cognition. For he explicitly concedes (*Rel.* 6:6.23–4): "the acceptance of this lawgiver's [i. e., God's] existence states more than the bare possibility of such an object."

"theoretically free" only if "everyone were scholarly" (*Rel.* 6:164.20–1). If Christian dogmatics regards "universal human reason in a natural religion […] as the supreme commanding principle", then "the doctrine of revelation, upon which a church is founded and which requires scholars as interpreters and preservers, must be loved and cultivated as a bare means, though an extremely valuable one, for providing the natural religion with comprehensibility […] and with proliferation and permanence" (*Rel.* 6:165.1–7).

"Part Two", entitled "On the Pseudoservice of God in a Statutory Religion" (*Rel.* 6:167.30–1), has four subsections; the first three deal with aspects of the fundamental *religious delusion* that Kant introduces in its untitled introduction. The delusion is to regard "statutory faith (which is […] restricted to one people and cannot contain the universal world religion)" as "the supreme condition of divine satisfaction"; moreover, pursuing this delusion "as essential to the service of God overall […] is a *pseudoservice*" (*Rel.* 6:168.4–9). The resulting anthropomorphism "is extremely dangerous in regard to our practical relation to [God's] will and for our morality itself; for we then *make a God for ourselves*" in the hope that "we can most easily win him over to our advantage and thus be exempted from the burdensome uninterrupted effort of acting upon the most inward aspect of our moral conviction" (*Rel.* 6:168.17–19, 169.1–7). Here and throughout these three subsections, wherein Kant accuses priests of abusing those under their care—they wield power over people by promoting the delusion that, with our churchly deeds, we human beings can effectively *control God*—Kant takes as granted that God and human beings somehow communicate. The standard visible church, with its reliance on historical tradition, takes its revealed scripture as the basis for understanding God's will. As we have seen, Kant does not deny that revelation plays a legitimate role in the spread of authentic religion, even though it can be so easily abused when taken as the primary rather than a subordinate means of communication with God. What, then, is Kant's *preferred* method of communicating with the God whose cooperation with us is the precondition for having any hope that we can accomplish the purpose of our nature and realize the highest good? Kant answers this question in the last section of the main text.

On numerous occasions in "Part Two" of the "Fourth Piece", and throughout *Religion*, Kant emphasizes that "the sole principle" of authentic (moral-rational) religion is "to become satisfactory to God […] only through moral conviction" (*Rel.* 6:173.14–17; see note 15). Thus, it should come as no surprise that he concludes the book with a section entitled "On the Guideline of Conscience in Matters of Faith" (*Rel.* 6:185.13). After describing conscience rather cryptically, as "*a consciousness that is by itself a duty*" (*Rel.* 6:185.18–19), Kant clarifies that, although consciousness of what is presented to us in experience is normally

deemed "necessary only for a logical aim" (*Rel.* 6:185.20–1)—i.e., as a component of empirical cognition—it is also relevant to practical reason because we should never act unless we are "*certain* that [the act] is not wrong" (*Rel.* 6:186.5–6). Given that the task of judging "[w]hether an action [...] is right or wrong" is done "by understanding, not by conscience" (*Rel.* 6:186.1–3) and that our understanding is easily mistaken, acting on conscience does not mean *doing the right thing*; rather, conscience is the awareness that one has *tried* to do the right thing. Thus, Kant's actual definition of conscience, as "*moral self-judgmental discernment*" (*Rel.* 6:186.10–11), further clarifies that conscience does not determine which actions do or do not "stand under the [moral] law, for this is what [practical] reason does"; instead, conscience refers to situations where reason "is judgmental about itself as to whether it has indeed really undertaken [...] that assessment of actions" (*Rel.* 6:186.12–14, 16–18). Kant employs this understanding of conscience as a principle that religious believers should use, whenever they are assessing whether or not a particular action has, in fact, been commanded by God.[23] The danger Kant hopes to avoid by focusing on the primacy of conscience is *hypocrisy* (e.g., *Rel.* 6:189.2). For God's real presence in the church occurs not outwardly, through historical forms as such, but inwardly, through our *conscience*, the closest human reason can come to hearing God's voice. In place of power-mongering priests and non-moral rituals, the true church must employ conscience as the egalitarian measuring rod for distinguishing true and false service of God.

Each of the four "Pieces" of *Religion* concludes with a "General Comment", whose content I have ignored so far, because Kant himself describes the topics of these sections as by-products or "*parerga* of religion within the bounds of pure reason" (*Rel.* 6:52.19–20). In Palmquist (2016, 2–3, 144–9, 233–47, 355–76, 477–500) I interpret these sections as the main passages in *Religion* where Kant promotes what I elsewhere (e.g., Palmquist 2019, 3 and *passim*) call "Critical mysticism". For in these four appendices, more than anywhere else in *Religion*, Kant deals with issues relating to what philosophers typically call "religious experience": the feeling of having experienced *effects of divine grace*; God acting in the world through *miracles*; God (as Trinity)[24] *calling* some people to salvation

---

23 Applying this principle, Kant thinks Abraham's willingness to obey God's command by killing his son illustrates a *lack* of conscience (*Rel.* 6:187.4–10). For a Kantian defense of Abraham, opposed to Kant's own interpretation of the story, see Palmquist and Rudisill (2009).

24 If this chapter were covering Kant's view of God's *nature*, not just the evidence for and status of God's *existence*, I would devote substantive attention to his theory of the moral trinity, which concerns "not so much what God is in himself (what his nature is) as what he is for us as moral beings, even though for the sake of this reference we must think and assume the divine natural make-up

while apparently leaving others to damnation; and the various *works of grace* that religious people sometimes perform in hopes of earning salvation. While limitations of space prevent me from examining these passages in detail here, I must nevertheless note that in each case Kant does not entirely reject the types of experience in question; instead, he proposes various ways in which those with a good conviction who seek to maintain religion within the bounds of bare reason can preserve a meaningful understanding of how human beings can communicate with God. In discussing prayer, for example, Kant does not completely dismiss its usefulness; rather, as Palmquist (1997) demonstrates, he repeatedly urges believers to focus on "the *spirit of prayer*" (*Rel.* 6:195.2–3; see also *Rel.* 6:195.6, 195.28, 196.3, 197.30), a lifestyle informed by a good conviction. Thus, he ends the third "General Comment" by warning against an overly literal interpretation of religious doctrines such as the Trinity: "the bare literalist faith more readily corrupts rather than reforms true religious conviction" (*Rel.* 6:147.13–14). I have argued throughout this chapter that Kant's emphasis on directing the religious person's attention away from theoretical proofs and literalist doctrine and towards practical reasoning and conscientious virtue is not evidence that Kant was promoting a religion without an actual God. Quite to the contrary, Kantian religion humbly promotes belief in a real God who is, as St. Augustine's famous claim is often paraphrased, "closer to us than we are to ourselves."[25]

---

as is needed for this relation in the complete perfection required for the execution of his will (e.g., as [that] of an unchangeable, omniscient, almighty, etc. being); and apart from this reference we cannot cognize anything in him" (*Rel.* 6:139.14–21). As such, we experience God as "*holy* lawgiver [...], as *benevolent* governor and [...] as *just* judge" (*Rel.* 6:139.24–7). This moral trinity "contains no mystery, because it expresses solely God's moral behavior toward the human race; it also offers itself on its own to any human reason, and is therefore found in the religion of most civilized peoples" (*Rel.* 6:140.1–4). Significantly, such passages refer repeatedly to God's *behavior* toward humanity, thus assuming that a real God communicates with us.

25 This commonly quoted English version of St. Augustine's well-known statement comes from his *Confessions*, 3.6.11. In Augustine (1876, 46), the Latin original of the full sentence ("*tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*") is translated: "Thou wert more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest." As we have seen, Kant's version of this claim *must* be communal ("us [...] we"), as the common paraphrase expresses it, rather than individual ("me [...] my"), as in Augustine's original version.

References

Augustine of Hippo, St. (between 397–400), *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. by Joseph Green Pilkington (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1876).

Chignell, Andrew, "The Devil, the Virgin, and the Envoy: Symbols of Moral Struggle in *Religion* II.2," in *Klassiker Auslegen: Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, ed. by Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 111–30.

Despland, Michel, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973).

di Giovanni, George, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

DiCenso, James, *Kant's* Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: *A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

McCarthy, Vincent A., *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

Michalson, Gordon E., *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1979).

Miller, Eddis N., *Kant's "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason": A Reader's Guide* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?," *Kant-Studien* 83.2 (1992), 129–48.

Palmquist, Stephen R., " 'The Kingdom of God is at Hand!' (Did *Kant* really say *that?*)," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 11.4 (1994), 421–37.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Critical Hermeneutic of Prayer," *The Journal of Religion* 77.4 (1997), 584–604.

Palmquist, Stephen R., *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000; reprinted New York: Routledge, 2019).

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kantian Redemption: A Critical Challenge to Christian Views of Faith and Works," *Philosophia Christi* 9.1 (2007), 29–38.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Quasi-Transcendental Argument for a Necessary and Universal Evil Propensity in Human Nature," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46.2 (2008), 261–97.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God—The Ultimate Dependence of Human Destiny on Divine Assistance," *Faith and Philosophy* 26.1 (2009), 3–22.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance," *The Journal of Religion* 90.4 (2010), 530–53.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Could Kant's Jesus Be God?," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52.4 (2012), 421–37.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Prudential Theory of Religion: The Necessity of Historical Faith for Moral Empowerment," *Con-textos Kantianos* 1 (2015a), 57–76.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "What is Kantian *Gesinnung?* On the Priority of Volition over Metaphysics and Psychology in Kant's *Religion*," *Kantian Review* 20.2 (2015b), 235–64.

Palmquist, Stephen R., *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Model for Building the True Church: Transcending 'Might Makes Right' and 'Should Makes Good' through the Idea of a Non-Coercive Theocracy," *Diametros* 54 (2017), 76–94.

Palmquist, Stephen R., *Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason's Light* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019).

Palmquist, Stephen R., "How Political is the Kantian Church?," *Diametros* 17.65 (2020), 95–113.

Palmquist, Stephen R./ Otterman, Steven, "The Implied Standpoint of Kant's *Religion:* An Assessment of Kant's Reply to (and an English Translation of) an Early Book Review of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*," *Kantian Review* 18.1 (2013), 73–97.

Palmquist, Stephen R./ Rudisill, Philip, "Three Perspectives on Abraham's Defense Against Kant's Charge of Immoral Conduct," *The Journal of Religion* 89.4 (2009), 467–97.

Pasternack, Lawrence, *Kant on Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

Wood, Allen W., "Kant's Deism," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. by Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1–21.

Eckart Förster

Kant on Proofs of God's Existence in the *Opus postumum* (1796–1804)

1

Kant's reflections on God's existence in his last unfinished work, the so-called *Opus postumum*, are the culmination of his life-long occupation with this topic. During his long career, Kant had tried all options concerning proofs of God's existence, only eventually to realize their respective shortcomings. In the *Opus postumum*, where he pursues a different line, he presupposes these earlier results without explicitly mentioning them again, thereby posing unique challenges for his interpreters. Since his ultimate position is hardly intelligible without this background, I will briefly summarize his earlier positions.

1.1 Theoretical Reason

Early in his career, Kant thought that he could prove God's existence from the very concept of possibility. Possibility, he thought, presupposes necessary existence and thus can provide the (only possible) basis [*Beweisgrund*] for such a proof. Yet before long, he came to realize that logical necessity is not the same as necessary existence and that no contradiction arises from thinking the non-existence of any being. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he developed this realization into an argument that theoretical proofs of God's existence are *in principle* impossible. It is not possible by purely theoretical means to show that the concept 'God' is not an empty concept. All existential claims are synthetic and thus go beyond what is thought in a concept. Consequently, the truth-value of such claims cannot be decided without recourse to experience. Since, in the case of the divine being, this is not an option, theoretical reason must remain agnostic with regard to God's existence.

1.2 Practical Reason

However, according to the Kant of the first *Critique*, practical reason is in a different position. As a human being, I have to act; consequently, I cannot but have two supreme goals: The highest goal I set for myself as a natural being is the optimal

satisfaction of my needs and desires, i. e., my own happiness. My highest goal as a rational being is the realization of the moral law. As experience teaches, these two goals are often in conflict. Why?

If everyone acted morally, Kant claims, the harmony between morality and happiness had to be conceived "as necessary" (*CPR* A 809/B 837). Since the advancement of the happiness of others is a moral duty, in this case we would ourselves be the authors of both our own enduring happiness and that of others. But this idea of a "self-rewarding morality," as Kant makes clear, is correct only "on the condition that *everyone* does what he ought" (*CPR* A 810/B 838). In actuality, of course, this is not the case, and my own happiness stands in no direct relation to my virtue. Why be moral, then, if this implies forgoing my happiness?

In all these cases, Kant maintains, the moral law's bindingness [*Verbindlichkeit*], it's categorical 'You ought to,' nevertheless remains untouched. I must therefore assume the possibility of a different connection between virtue and happiness than experience teaches. More precisely, it must be possible that happiness can also belong to me *because* I, the individual, act morally. Such connection can only hold in a "future life," in "the intelligible world, under a wise author and regent" (*CPR* A 811/B 839). Without such possibility, Kant claims, the ideas of morality might be uplifting but would not have any obligatory power and would not provide "incentives [*Triebfedern*] for resolve and realization" (*CPR* A 813/B 841). "Thus God and a future life are two presuppositions that are *not to be separated from the obligation* that pure reason imposes on us in accordance with principles of that very same reason." (*CPR* A 811/B 839, my italics) At this time, then, Kant thinks that God's existence must necessarily be postulated[1] to explain how moral ideas can be more than objects of approval and admiration and, indeed, propel us to act: "No morality can [...] be practical without religion." (*Lect. Pract. Phil. Powalski* 27/1:137.35–6)

It was Christian Garve's review of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that forced Kant to realize that this account involved a *petitio principii.* On the one hand, I must be convinced of the supreme being's distributive justice if the moral law is to determine my will even if this means that I have to forego my happiness. On the other hand, in the "Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had robbed his readers of the conviction that such a being exists. It is now only the moral bindingness that leads to the idea of God, yet the idea of God is supposed to vouchsafe moral bindingness in the first place. No God without moral obligation, no moral obligation

---

1 In this context, to postulate is to assert the existence of a being if this being is a necessary condition of the possibility of something indubitably certain like the moral law. "[T]his existence has to be postulated, because the conditioned from which the inference to this determinate condition proceeds is itself cognized *a priori* as absolutely necessary." (*CPR* A 634/B 662)

without God. As Garve put it in his review, "very few people" will be able to understand how "what cannot be known for speculative reasons, reason obliges [*bindet*] us to believe because it gives us a priori to recognize certain necessary rules of conduct, which could not, however, be true, or at least could not be incentives for our will without God and a future life."[2]

Kant thus had to show that pure reason can be practical of itself and that nothing other than the moral law is required as an incentive to action. This he tried to do in the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason.* When I act morally, Kant now argued, I subordinate my will to a law of which I myself am the author, but that is necessarily binding for every free rational being endowed with a will. What motivates my moral action is nothing but respect for such a law. A moral action—an action done from duty—is an action out of respect for the moral law. Thus, God is no longer needed as an incentive for moral actions.

Nevertheless, Kant now insists, God's existence must be postulated by practical reason for a different reason. For all willing inevitably has an object, something it aims to achieve *in this world.* This is, of course, also true of the moral will. Thus Kant also had to show that the ultimate object of a moral will, the "highest good" in which happiness and worthiness to be happy are in harmony, is not an empty idea but is achievable, is realizable in this world.[3] For only morality depends on my will, my happiness also depends on nature, that is, "on the harmony of *nature* with [my] entire end" (*CprR* 5:124.23–4).[4] Since neither the powers of the individual agent nor the laws of nature can bring about such harmony, we must assume a being that both knows our moral worth and is efficacious over nature if the moral law is not to be 'fantastic' and 'false.' In other words, pure practical reason must postulate God's existence as the sole condition of the real possibility of the highest good in this world. For only thus is it

> not impossible that the morality of disposition should have a connection, indeed a necessary connection, as cause with happiness as effect in the sensible world; but this relation is indirect, mediated by an intelligible Author of nature. This connection, however, can occur only contingently in a system of nature which is merely the object of the senses and as such is not sufficient to the highest good. (*CprR* 5:115.2–8)

---

2 Garve (1783, 238, 240).
3 If "the highest good is impossible according to practical rules, then the moral law, which commands us to promote it, must be fantastic and directed to empty imaginary ends and must therefore itself be false." (*CprR* 5:114.6–9)
4 Because the happiness in question is now empirical happiness, not the moral happiness of the first *Critique,* there can now be an "Antinomy of Practical Reason" (*CprR* 5:113.13–114.9). The first *Critique* had still excluded such an antinomy (see *CPR* A 795–7).

Contrary to what Kant says here, however, his argument at best only establishes that it is not impossible that there is a being who knows our moral dispositions and can cause 'happiness as effect in the sensible world.' That this being must also be the 'Author of nature' does not follow from his argument—the latter could, for all we know, be a demiurge without any moral qualities whatsoever (see, e. g., *OP* 22:34.5–8, *OP* 22:412.25–7, *OP* 21:214.35–7). Moreover, it remains unclear how the postulated divine being *could* be efficacious over nature without canceling nature's thoroughgoing lawfulness. According to the first *Critique* and the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, nature is to be thought of as causally deterministic; every natural event has a natural cause. How, in other words, God can intervene in nature without canceling the thoroughgoing lawfulness that is constitutive of it remains unclear at this level.[5]

1.3 The Power of Judgment

The latter difficulty is overcome with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and its realization that reflective judgment is an autonomous faculty with its own a priori principle of a formal purposiveness of nature. On the one hand, reflection on the empirical fact of natural beauty forces us to expand "our concept of nature, namely as mere mechanism, into the concept of nature as art" (*CPJ* 5:246.12–14). On the other hand, according to Kant, living organisms defy mechanical explanation and must be regarded as *natural* purposes. As such, they require means for the realization of their ends, which must hence also be viewed as purposive even though their modes of operation may be entirely mechanical. In other words, once we admit natural purposes, we cannot but extend our teleological reflection to nature as a whole. "This concept [of a natural purpose] leads reason into an order of things entirely different from that of a mere mechanism of nature, which will here no longer satisfy us" (*CPJ* 5:377.1–3).

If things in nature stand in relation to other things as means to ends, and the latter in turn may be means to yet other ends, the question arises whether there is a being in nature in which the chain terminates and which is not a means to other ends but is an end in itself. This can only be the human being since it alone can set

---

5 One might object that transcendental idealism makes a solution possible: every event in this world also has a noumenal 'cause'—the thing in itself. In the present case, the noumenal cause would be God's will. But this requires that we can think that a particular phenomenal event (my happiness) is due to both sufficient and final causes at the same time. I contend that Kant does not have the conceptual resources for such an assumption until the third *Critique* and the a priori principle of reflective judgment.

purposes for itself and use the other objects of nature as means to its own ends. But, Kant now claims, we only need to ask why human beings should exist in the first place in order to realize that nothing in nature has an *unconditional* worth or is a final end. Only if the human being is regarded not only as a natural being but at the same time as a noumenal being capable of freedom and autonomy can one not further ask "why (*quem in finem*) it exists" (*CPJ* 5:435.27). That is to say, our moral existence must be viewed not only as an end of nature but also as the final end of *creation:* "we recognize the human being as the end of creation only as a moral being" (*CPJ* 5:443.15–16). With this, reflective judgment must also assume a moral author of the world, a lawgiver in whose will the final end (of the creation of the world) is what can and ought to be the final human end: "For if creation has a final end at all, we cannot conceive of it except as having to correspond to the final end of morality" (*CPJ* 5:453.32–5).[6] The final end of creation and the highest good of morality must coincide.

This changes the entire picture. So far, Kant had concentrated on the questions, 'What ought *I* to do?' given that others do not always act morally (see *CPR* A 805/B 833); and, 'How can the concept of *my* happiness in proportion to my worthiness to be happy nevertheless have objective validity' (see *CPR* A 809/B 837)?[7] But when it comes to the final end of creation, this cannot be any moral individual and its deserved happiness, but only humanity as a moral people of God. The highest good qua final end of creation must be an ethical community as a system of well-disposed people or a moral world.

This sets the stage for the next round. The duty to promote the highest good in the world is thus the duty to promote "the highest good as a good common to all [*eines gemeinschaftlichen Guts*]," Kant points out in the *Religion*; it is a duty not of humans toward humans but "of the human race toward itself" (*Rel.* 6:97.17–21). But how can *this* concept of the highest good have objective reality and be more than an empty, at best uplifting concept? How can an ethical community, a "universal republic based on laws of virtue" (*Rel.* 6:98.3), be realized in this world?

---

6 Although the concept of a final end of morality is a concept of practical reason, the concept of God as a moral author of the world and as the original ground of the creation is a concept of reflective judgment: "we may well say that given the constitution of our faculty of reason we could not even make comprehensible the kind of purposiveness related to the moral law and its object that exists in this final end without an author and ruler of the world who is at the same time a moral legislator." (*CPJ* 5:455.32–7)

7 Since virtue (worthiness to be happy) is always the virtue of an individual, happiness in proportion to virtue is also the happiness of an individual. That is to say, "the second element of the highest good [is] *one's own happiness*" (*CprR* 5:127.12, my italics).

In Kant's picture, human nature seems to make this impossible. Even agents with the best intentions find themselves surrounded by envy and greed, resentment and mistrust, social rivalry, and power struggles. Because of our "social unsociability,"[8] we live in what Kant now calls, in analogy with the Hobbesian state of nature, the ethical state of nature. This is a state of moral corruption in which the members continuously tempt each other to violate the moral law: "it suffices that they are there, that they surround him, and that they are human beings, and they will mutually corrupt one another's moral disposition and make one another evil" (*Rel.* 6:94.4–6). If the highest good qua final end of creation is to be possible as a social good, then, it can only come about through the joint effort of *all* individuals, who must jointly leave the ethical state of nature in order to form a "universal republic based on the laws of virtue." (*Rel.* 6:98.3)

It thus presupposes a changed moral disposition of its members. However, we cannot hope to achieve this ourselves, Kant claims, but only with God's help. We can represent the form of an ethical community in its purity, but our sensuous nature and social antagonism are such that we cannot hope to realize the highest good without divine support: "To found a moral people of God is, therefore, a work whose execution cannot be hoped for from human beings but only from God himself" (*Rel.* 6:100.29–31):

> Since by himself the human being cannot realize the idea of the highest good inseparably bound up with the pure moral disposition, either with respect to the happiness which is part of that good or with respect to the union of the human beings necessary to the fulfillment of the end, and yet there is also in him the duty to promote the idea, he finds himself driven to believe in the cooperation or the management of a moral ruler of the world, through which alone this end is possible (*Rel.* 6:139.1–7).

However, this view does not stand up to close scrutiny, and Kant did not hold it for long. If God changed our moral disposition, we would no longer be responsible for the resulting actions, and they would lose all moral worth. Kant states this explicitly in the *Opus postumum,* when he writes, "it is not even in the divine power to make a morally good man (to make him morally good): He must do it himself" (*OP* 21:83.21–2, see *OP* 21:34.7–8, *OP* 21:66.19–21). "That man acts morally can be *demanded* by God but not *made* or *coerced* by him." (*OP* 21:57.8–9) If human beings cannot

---

8 In his 1784 essay, "Ideas for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," Kant had argued that human beings are inflicted by nature with "an unsocial sociability," that is, "their propensity to enter into society, which, however, is combined with thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society. The predisposition for this obviously lies in human nature." (*Universal History* 8:20.31–4)

bring about the ethical community on their own, it cannot be brought about by God either.

Thus, reflective judgment joins theoretical and practical reason in the inability to establish God's existence. This seems to have exhausted all possibilities with respect to God as an existing being "outside the human being" (*Rel.* 6:6.9), hence as a postulate.

2

Kant did not begin work on his *Opus postumum* because of problems in his ethics or his philosophy of religion. This work, to which he wanted to give the title *Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics*, was intended to solve a problem in his philosophy of science. In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), Kant had declared that science properly so-called must exhibit systematic unity and apodictic certainty with respect to its fundamental laws. Neither can be the result of empirical investigation. They are of a priori origin and hence need to be accounted for by the philosopher. Yet whereas Kant, in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, accounted for apodictic certainty in physics by providing the principles of construction for its fundamental object ("a something that is to be an object of the outer senses" (*MFNS* 4:476.10)), he did not, nor could he at the time, provide insight into the possibility of physics' systematicity. The reason for this he stated clearly a few years later: one cannot "undertake to *classify* the whole of nature according to its empirical differences" if one has no a priori reason to presuppose "that nature itself *specifies* its transcendental laws in accordance with some sort of principle" (*First Introduction* 20:215.15–17).

Neither the *Critique of Pure Reason* nor the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* knew any such principle. But when Kant started to work on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, such a principle unexpectedly came into view: Nature, for the sake of our power of judgment, specifies its universal laws of nature to empirical ones, according to the form of a logical system (see *First Introduction* 20:216.1–3). This principle of a formal purposiveness of nature, Kant came to think, when combined with the general theory of matter, makes possible a 'Transition' from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics.[9] Such 'Transition'

---

9 "[T]he power of judgment first makes it possible, indeed necessary, to conceive in nature, over and above its mechanical necessity, a purposiveness without the presupposition of which systematic unity in the thoroughgoing classification of particular forms in accordance with empirical laws would not be possible." (*First Introduction* 20:219.4–8)

must provide an elementary system of the moving forces of matter if physics is to be possible as a systematic science. His argument, briefly, goes like this.

Since experience is only one, and experience is cognition by means of connected perceptions, and perceptions require moving forces that affect the subject, the space in which perceptions can be connected must be thought of as filled everywhere with moving forces. There must be a force continuum filling space in order for outer experience to be possible. This force continuum—"the hypostatized space itself, as it were, in which everything moves" (*OP* 21:224.11–12)—Kant calls ether or caloric [*Wärmestoff*]. "Since [...] no space, as empty, is an object of experience, it follows that this matter is extended through the entire cosmos and that its existence is necessary—necessary, that is to say, relative to objects of the senses." (*OP* 21:224.18–20)

That there is an ether is consequently "not an empirical (derived from experience) hence not an *ampliative*, but only an *explicative* judgment" (*OP* 21:600.26–8). It can be established analytically from the conditions of possible experience of outer objects.[10] This concept of the ether is thus not to be confused with a hypothesis for the explanation of physical phenomena. Rather, it is the idea of an "individual object" containing the whole of moving forces within it (hence has *collective*, not merely *discursive* universality). As such, it is an *ideal* in the transcendental sense[11]: "The object of a single, all-embracing experience is, at the same time, an individual (*individuum*)." (*OP* 22:611.17–18)

If the ether is an ideal, we must be able, according to Kant, to determine it through the mere concept of it, in accordance with the table of categories (see *CPR* A 580/B 608). That is to say, the ether "is *universally distributed* [Quantity], *all-penetrating* [Quality], and *all-moving* [Relation] [...]. And as such, it is necessary, that is, *permanent* [Modality]" (*OP* 21:584.25–9). "This matter [the ether] is also, as a consequence of the aforementioned attributes, negatively characterized: as imponderable, incoercible, incohesible and inexhaustible [...]. Ponderability, coercibility, cohesion, and exhaustibility presuppose moving forces which act in opposition to the latter and cancel their effect" (*OP* 22:610.9–14).

All objects of outer sense thus depend on moving forces that *limit* the original force continuum. The physicist must investigate them systematically and deter-

---

10 "One wishes to know whether something like this all-penetrating material distributed throughout the universe (call it caloric or ether or whatever) *exists*, and the answer one receives is that, if it does not exist, then even the *possibility* of experience of it (which, as *a priori* certain, cannot be doubted) would not be permissible." (*OP* 21:226.6–11)

11 See *CPR* A 568/B 596: By an ideal, "I understand the idea not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo*, i. e., as an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone." See also *CPR* A 574/B 602.

mine their degree. To this end, the concept of the ether provides the "sketch of the system"—an "Elementary System"—and with it the "topic of the moving forces of matter" (*OP* 22:299.9–10) in which specific empirical forces of nature can be assigned their location. "For all so-called *experiences* are always only parts of *one* experience, in virtue of the universally distributed, unbounded caloric which connects all celestial bodies in one system and sets them into a community of reciprocity." (*OP* 22:554.30–3) The whole precedes the parts and makes possible their interconnection.[12]

But how does one experience moving forces of matter? The 'Elementary System' as such does not yet yield knowledge of real forces. It merely provides a topic for actual forces. So, what does the physicist exactly do when investigating nature?

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had insisted that we can extract clear concepts of, e.g., space, time, causation, from experience only because we have previously inserted them into experience, and because experience is thus itself brought about by means of them (see *CPR* A 196/B 241). Empirical forces, however, cannot be known through thinking about them; they can be experienced only by interacting with them, in the to and from of *action* and *reaction.* The investigators of nature must consequently insert a priori into the appearances the forces they seek to know in them. But how?

In order to do so, the physicist must be embodied and have a location in space. The next step of the argument must thus be to explain how the subject of thought can also be an empirical body in space, in other words, how the subject posits (constitutes) itself as a given object outside the thought of itself. Such an explanation had, in fact, been a *desideratum* since the second edition of the first *Critique* to which Kant had added a 'Refutation of Idealism.' It stated that "the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me" (*CPR* B 275). However, for something to be outside me, I must have a location in space, and for this I must have a physical body. Furthermore, this body, like all sense-objects, has to be constituted if transcendental idealism is true. How this is to be thought of exactly, given that space is "merely in us" (*CPR* A 373), remained unclear in the first *Critique.*

Kant addresses precisely this issue with the so-called *Selbstsetzungslehre* (doctrine of self-positing) of the *Opus postumum*, of which I can only give a thumbnail-sketch here.[13] The first act of self-positing is that of self-consciousness, of making

---

12 This crucial thought—that the whole (the ether/ the system) necessarily precedes the parts (the objects/ the elements)—makes possible the 'Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics.' It will also be vital for understanding Kant's reflections on God's existence in the *Opus postumum* to which I will turn shortly.

13 For a more detailed account of Kant's *Selbstsetzungslehre*, see Förster (2000, 101–16).

oneself into an object of thought: I am I. Kant calls it a "logical" or "analytic" act, according to the principle of identity. This first act implies, on the one hand, a duality of the I (I as subject and I as object). It also implies, on the other hand, what Kant calls the incomprehensible imperative "*nosce te ipsum* [know thyself]" (*OP* 22:22.8–9), making it impossible for the thinking I to remain at the level of 'I am I' and drives it to go beyond this original act of self-consciousness to the knowledge of itself.

In order for the I to be known, it must be determinable. That is, it must be relatable to something other than itself, i. e., to something given. The second act must thus be a synthetic one. The I that thinks must determine the forms under which something *can be given* to the spontaneity of thought: "The first progress of the faculty of representation (*facultas repraesentativa*) is that from pure thought in general to pure intuition: space and time [...]. They are not objects (*entia*), but mere forms of a priori intuition." (*OP* 22:83.23–6) For experience of something other to be possible, however, space must be represented not merely as a formal intuition, but as something outside me, as a manifold of empirically identifiable locations. In order to be perceivable, therefore, space must be thought of as thoroughly filled with moving forces: "There must first be a matter filling space, ceaselessly self-moving by agitating forces (attraction and repulsion), before the location in space of every particle can be determined. This is the basis for any matter as object of possible experience" (*OP* 21:550.28–31). The hypostatization of space, or the idea of a universally distributed force-continuum (ether) that fills space, is thus the next step in Kant's *Selbstsetzungslehre.*

But more is needed for outer experience to be possible. If there is to be experience of any object *in* space, it must be possible to think the object as exercising forces on me that give rise to its perception. Such forces likewise have to be presupposed a priori. But these forces, Kant had argued earlier, can only be experienced as *reactions* to the subject's actions of "inserting" forces into the as yet undetermined spatial manifold. Self-affection and affections through objects are inseparable: "The moving forces of matter are what the moving subject itself does with its body to [other] bodies. The reactions corresponding to these forces are contained in the simple acts by which we perceive the bodies themselves." (*OP* 22:326.30–327.2) This is a crucial step of Kant's argument: Only because I have a body—a system of organically moving forces—can I be affected by moving forces of matter; on the other hand, only insofar as I can represent myself as affected do I appear to myself as embodied and as an object of outer sense. "The subject affects itself and becomes an object *in appearance* for itself in the composition of the moving forces" (*OP* 22:364.24–5).

However, the moving forces of matter are not the only moving forces that the subject composes, as Kant now points out. There are also moving forces of moral-

practical reason operative in nature: "*Moral-practical reason is one of the moving forces of nature* and of all sense-objects." (*OP* 22:105.10–12)

> There is an all-comprehending nature (in space and time) in which reason coordinates all physical relations into unity. There is a universally ruling operative cause with freedom in rational beings, and, [given] with the latter, a categorical imperative which connects them all, and, with that, in turn, an all-embracing, morally commanding, original being—a God.
>
> The phenomena from the moving forces of moral-practical reason, in so far as they are a priori with respect to men in relation to one another, are the ideas of right. (*OP* 22:104.7–15)

3

The doctrine of self-positing paves the way for the transition to the practical part of the *Opus postumum.* For I do not just constitute myself as an object among other things in space and time, but also as a *person,* thereby raising myself above all sensuous beings. What does this mean? In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant had defined a person as "a subject whose actions can be *imputed* to him" (*MM* 6:223.24) and who "is regarded as the author (*causa libera*) of an action, which is then called *deed* (*factum*) and stands under laws" (*MM* 6:227.22–3).

The possibility of being a person in this sense is also inherent in the doubling of the I in self-consciousness.[14] In virtue of the ability to distinguish myself from myself and make myself into an object of thought, I can view myself as it were from the standpoint of another person. Because I am also endowed with a will, I can command my own nature and determine my will accordingly. I become accountable for what I do, and, in virtue of the numerical identity of the 'I,' I remain the same imputable subject throughout. In other words, "I am a principle of synthetic self-determination to myself, not merely according to a law of the *receptivity of nature*, but also according to a principle of the *spontaneity of freedom.*" (*OP* 22:131.1–3)

From Kant's earlier writings we know what the 'principle of the spontaneity of freedom' amounts to. Freedom is not to be confused with randomness or haphazardness. Even a free will is law-governed. However, I can only be subject to law and remain free at the same time, if the law to which I am subject is not imposed on me from without but has been authored by myself. A free will is an autonomous will. Of course, what is true for me must also be true for all other free rational

---

14 "The fact that the human being can have the 'I' in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a person, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person—i. e., through rank and dignity an entirely different being from things [*Sachen*]" (*Anthropology* 7:127.4–10).

agents endowed with a will. The limiting condition of my own freedom is thus the freedom of every other rational being, and vice versa.

Thus, when the I that posits itself constitutes itself as moral-practical reason, it subjects itself to 'a principle of the spontaneity of freedom' that reflects this reciprocity. It imposes upon itself the law of freedom in the form of a categorical imperative: Act only in such a way that you always treat free rational beings, whether yourself and others, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end—i. e., as self-determining and as autonomous (see *GMM* 4:429.10–12).

Every self-determining, autonomous being thus has the right to be treated as an end and not as a means, and consequently also has a duty to treat every other free rational being in the same way. As soon as reason imposes its own law upon itself in the form of the categorical imperative, the concepts of duty and right arise with it, and it is in this context alone, Kant now emphasizes, that I can posit myself as a *person.* The earlier definition of a person as a subject whose actions can be imputed to him now receives a further refinement: a person is "a being capable of rights, who can encounter wrong or can consciously do it, and who stands under the categorical imperative" (*OP* 22:55.24–6). Or, in another passage: "*Every human being* is, in virtue of *his freedom* and of the law which *restricts* it, made subject to necessitation through his moral-practical reason, [and] stands under command and prohibition, and, as a man, under the imperative of duty." (*OP* 22:120.16–19).

In his earlier writings, Kant had introduced the categorical imperative as the response to the question 'What ought I to do?' (see *CPR* A 80–1/B 836–7). In the *Opus postumum*, a different aspect of the categorical imperative is at the forefront—the imperative's role as a "principle of unification" of all rational world beings: "[T]here is in moral-practical reason a categorical imperative, which extends to all rational world-beings and through which all world-beings are united." (*OP* 22:105.1–3)

In the *Religion*, we recall, Kant had argued that in addition to the duties of humans toward humans, we have the duty "of the human race toward itself," namely, the duty to promote "the highest good as a good common to all [*eines gemeinschaftlichen Guts*]" (*Rel.* 6:97.17–21). We have the duty, that is, to make as the final end of our practical reason what we must view as the final end of creation: an ethical community as the kingdom of God on earth. It is this duty and with it the ethical community, I take it, that is in the background of Kant's discussion, in the *Opus postumum,* of the categorical imperative as the 'principle of unification' of free rational world-beings: "The most important of all the concepts of reason, because it is directed toward the final end [...] is the concept of duty and the legislation relating to it, as a concept of practical reason." (*OP* 22:126.9–12)

What does Kant mean by the 'legislation' relating to the final end? A juridico-civil (political) state is constituted by statutory laws that bind its members together externally. This is made possible by the joint powers of legislature, executive, and judiciary. To avoid abuse of power, these must necessarily be divided among three different departments within the state. Also, there must be all three of them. One without the others would be futile. Without legislation, there can be no jurisdiction and no executive. Similarly, a legislature in the absence of the other two powers would be idle; a law whose violation had no consequences according to principles would not be a law.[15]

An ethical community, a "people of God under ethical laws" (*Rel.* 6:98.17), must be organized differently. Here we are concerned, not with the legality of actions which can be seen, but with morality, hence with the agent's dispositions which cannot be seen. Consequently, what unites its members can only be a legislation that is "purely internal" (*Rel.* 6:100.9). But how, exactly, is such internal legislation to be possible?

> The first question is: whether there is a moral-practical reason, and, with this, concepts of duty as principles of freedom under laws; then: whether there is a substance which judges according to these laws (by exonerating or condemning men), declares men worthy or unworthy of happiness, and makes them partake of it in consequence. (*OP* 22:125.23–8)

There is moral-practical reason: I constitute myself as a person—and thus as a potential member of an ethical community—when I limit my own freedom by imposing the moral law upon myself, with its associated notions of right and duty. And so does every other free rational being. This does not suffice, however, for a legislation in the ethical community. A law, even one that I give to myself, can be regarded as a *law* only if sanctions may accompany its transgressions in accordance with principles. A law to which no consequences are attached and which regulates nothing would be null and void as a law. Or, as Kant puts it: "There must also, however, be—or at least be thought—a legislative force (*potestas legislatoria*) which gives these laws emphasis (effect) although only in idea." (*OP* 22:126.18–20)[16]

---

15 For Kant, it follows by "the principle of contradiction," i.e., analytically, that right as such is always connected with an authorization to coerce someone who infringes upon it (*MM* 6:231.32–4). This must also be true of the law that unites the members of an ethical community: "The *a priori* relation of right as moral compulsion." (*OP* 22:129.10)

16 Interestingly, Kant had already said this much in the *Critique of Pure Reason:* "everyone also regards the moral laws as *commands*, which, however, they could not be if they did not connect appropriate consequences with their rule a priori, and thus carry with them *promises* and *threats.* This, however, they could not do if they did not lie in a necessary being, as the highest good, which alone can make possible such a purposive unity." (*CPR* A 812/B 840) In the *Opus postumum*, how-

This force cannot issue from me. Neither do I have the required power, nor can I know for certain an agent's inner motives—be it myself or others (see *GMM* 4:407.1–16). In this case, a non-human being must be the source of a legislative force. Moreover, it must be a being who knows the innermost intentions and dispositions of the agents, and who has power over all. It must be a being in whom the three powers of legislature, judiciary, and executive are united—"a threefold person, according to [his] powers" (*OP* 21:29.6)—i. e., God. "A command to which everyone must absolutely give obedience, is to be regarded by everyone as from a being which rules and governs over all. Such a being, as moral, however, is called God. So there is a God" (*OP* 22:127.1–4). "The concept of God is [...] the concept of a being that can *obligate all moral beings* without itself [being] obligated, and, hence, has rightful power over them all." (*OP* 22:121.12–15)

For this reason Kant now writes that the categorical imperative can be regarded as the voice of God (see *OP* 22:64.28–9), and that we must regard our duties as divine commands. In his earlier writings, Kant had defined *religion* ("subjectively considered") as the recognition of all our duties as divine commands (*CprR* 5:129.18–19, *Rel.* 6:103.36–7, *Rel.* 6:153.28–9) and had distinguished it thus from the ethical recognition of our duties. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he reiterated this position but provided the following supplementation:

> The ground on which a human being is to think of all his duties in keeping with this *formal aspect* of religion (their relation to a divine will given a priori) is only subjectively logical. That is to say, we cannot very well make obligation (moral constraint) intuitive for ourselves without thereby thinking of *another's* will, namely God's (of which reason in giving universal laws is only the spokesman).—But this duty *with regard to God* (properly speaking, with regard to the idea we ourselves make of such a being) is a duty of a human being to himself, that is, it is not objective, an obligation to perform certain services for another, but only subjective, for the sake of strengthening the moral incentive in our own lawgiving reason. *(MM* 6:487.17–25)

In the *Opus postumum*, the reason why we must regard our duties as divine commands is different. This formula is used neither to characterize the religious attitude nor to express the individuals' subjective duty to strengthen their moral incentive. Rather, it contains the answer to the (ethical) question whether pure practical reason can connect any consequences—moving forces—with the concept of duty. What is at stake is the possibility of moral legislation in an ethical community. It is for this reason that the *categorical imperative* is now viewed as the voice of God: "Moral-practical reason, if it contains laws of duty (rules of conduct in con-

---

ever, Kant is concerned not with the individual moral agent but with the conditions of the possibility of legislation in an ethical community.

formity with the categorical imperative), leads to the concept of God" (*OP* 22:116.9–11). "The moral imperative can be regarded as the voice of God." (*OP* 21:64.28–9)

It may seem as if Kant, in his last work, is sacrificing autonomy and readmitting heteronomy into his ethics, thus falling back behind his position of the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals.* And we certainly would not expect a sentence like the following in either the *Groundwork* or the second *Critique:* "*To prescribe all human duties as divine commands is already contained in every categorical imperative.*" (*OP* 22:120.1–2) Nevertheless, I contend, Kant is not suddenly readmitting heteronomy into his ethics. The moral law is the law of freedom, and freedom is autonomy, so as a free rational being, I am inevitably the author of the moral law. But so is, of course, every other free rational being endowed with a will. We all, in virtue of our freedom, co-author the same moral law. But, as we have just seen, neither I nor any other finite agent like myself can endow the moral law with "legislative force." Thus, although we are authors of the moral law, we are not at the same time authors of its obligatory force or bindingness, are not strictly speaking "lawgivers." It is for this reason that we must view our duties at the same time as divine commands.[17]

> A (morally practical) *law* is a proposition that contains a categorical imperative (a command). One who commands (*imperans*) through a law is the *lawgiver* (*legislator*). He is the author (*autor*) of the obligation in accordance with the law, but not always the author of the law. In the latter case the law would be a positive (contingent) and a chosen law. A law that binds us a priori and unconditionally by our own reason can also be expressed as proceeding from the will of a supreme lawgiver, that is, one who has only rights and no duties (hence from the divine will); but this signifies only the idea of a moral being whose will is a law for everyone, without his being thought as the author of the law. (*MM* 6:227.10–20)

If it is a duty of mankind to advance from the ethical state of nature to an ethical community, then such an ethical state must be possible, and with it the legislation that is constitutive of it. We can now see why Kant claims, in the *Opus postumum*, that it is already contained in the categorical imperative that we must prescribe all human duties as divine commands. It is already "contained" in the categorical imperative—i. e., analytically—that there is no command without a commander, no imperative without a being that gives it "emphasis (effect) although only in idea."

'Only in idea.' For we cannot know, according to Kant, that such a being ever issued a command to us, nor even that there is a God.[18] That is why the expression

---

17 "A universal, morally law-giving being which, thus [*mithin!*], has all power, is God." (*OP* 22:122.22–3)

18 "There can be no doubt that no command or prohibition can really have been issued to man by a holy, powerful being, or, if this were to have happened, that man could not have perceived this

'as divine commands' really means '*as if* they were divine commands'—"*tanquam non ceu*" (*OP* 22:116.24), as Kant explicates. But this 'as if' is such that it could not at any time turn out to be false. Since a law without consequences cannot be thought of as a law, it is an analytic, not a synthetic proposition that, if there is a moral law, there must be a lawgiver who is the author of the obligatory force of the law. In other words, moral-practical reason contains a principle "which emerges from freedom and which [the subject] prescribes to itself, and yet as if another and higher person had made it a rule for him" (*OP* 22:129.14–16).

Kant's position in the *Opus postumum* now comes into clearer focus. It presupposes the results of the third *Critique* and of the *Religion* that we must think a final end of creation, and that this final end can only be a kingdom of God on earth, an ethical community. But it also takes for granted that theoretical reason, practical reason, as well as judgment cannot establish the existence of God as a substance outside of reason. Whether God exists "outside the human being" (*Rel.* 6:6.9) is no longer asked, or only rhetorically.[19] Indeed, Kant now goes so far as to say that to ask whether God exists outside us (synthetically) would be "self-contradictory" (*OP* 22:116.26) since God is analytically connected with the concepts of right and duty, i.e., with the concept of the moving forces that make possible the unity of free rational beings. In the *Opus postumum,* Kant engages exclusively in the self-examination of reason, the principles that allow for the constitution of theoretical and practical reason, and the positing of the self as both, a natural being and as a person. Kant tries to show that I could not posit myself as a person without the ideal of God, just as I cannot posit myself as a natural being without the ideal of an ether. "The principle of right in the categorical imperative makes the totality [das All] necessary as absolute unity." (*OP* 22:109.13–15) God thus necessarily exists in moral-practical reason—as "the personified idea of right" (*OP* 22:108.11–12), as moral-practical reason with its own moving forces. "The concept of God is the idea of a moral being, which, as such, is judging [and] universally commanding. The latter is not a hypothetical thing but pure practical reason itself in its personality, with reason's moving forces in respect to world-beings and their forces." (*OP* 22:118.14–18)

---

voice and convince himself of its reality. Thus there is *no alternative* but to regard the knowledge of our duties as *instar* divine commands, which do not lose any of their authority because of the inevitable ignorance of such prophecy. Therefore, the moral imperative can be regarded as the voice of God." (*OP* 22:64.21–9)

19 "Whether there is a God (in substance) or not, cannot be a point of controversy, for it is not an *object* of dispute (*obiectum litis*). It is not existing beings *outside* the judging subject, about whose characteristics it would be possible to dispute, but the mere idea of pure reason which examines its own principles." (*OP* 22:52.25–53.2)

This, then, is Kant's final position concerning God's existence, the result of his life-long reflections on this topic. "*Est deus in nobis,*" he now quotes Ovid's *Fasti* approvingly (see *OP* 22:130.5). Or, in his own words: "It cannot be denied that such a being exists; yet it cannot be asserted that it exists outside rationally thinking man." (*OP* 22:55.9–11) More transcendental philosophy cannot say.

References

Garve, Christian (1783), "Rezension von Immanuel Kants Critique der reinen Vernunft," reprinted in *Immanuel Kant.* Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können, ed. by Rudolf Malter (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1989), 219–46.

Förster, Eckart, *Kant's Final Synthesis. An Essay on the* Opus postumum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Part 2: **A Classification of Kant's Proofs for God's Existence**

Ina Goy

Kant on Divine Artistry in Nature. Variants of the Physico-theological Argument

1 The Question

In this paper, I would like to answer the question whether nature, in Kant's eyes, is a product of divine design. More precisely, this is the question whether the intentional or quasi-intentional structures that underly nature's beauty and purposiveness are caused by one or a group of divine designers or can be accounted for by natural causes alone.[1]

1.1 Nature Is No Product of Divine Design

In one of the most prominent current Kant interpretations, Hannah Ginsborg rejects the notion of nature as a product of divine design (mainly related to Kant's accout of nature in the *CPJ*). She notes that in "Kant's account of organisms as natural purposes" the "function of a trait or entity is not what it was in fact designed to do [and she means designed to do by a divine designer], but simply what it should or ought to do" (Ginsborg 2014, 263). Ginsborg argues that organisms possess in themselves a natural tendency or capacity to develop, to react, and to go on in a way that they are supposed to or ought to, and she calls this natural capacity "primitive normativity" (Ginsborg 2014, 266). Ginsborg illustrates the notion of primitive normativity with the Wittgensteinian example of rule following (*Philosophical Investigations* §185) which shows that a pupil who is asked to continue the number series 2, 4, 6, 8 ... 1000 will not continue it with 1004 ("plus 4") or

---

[1] The traditional physico-theological or design argument is an inductive argument; it derives God's existence a posteriori from empirical premises. The argument begins with the identification of empirical properties as design-indicative features of nature (marks of divine design)—for instance the observation of beauty, fine-tuning, purposiveness, and order of things—and rejects that chance could be the cause of these features of nature. It states that marks of design require the presupposition of a designer with intellectual capacities such as intelligence and intentionality who is able to cause the design-indicative features of nature. It identifies this designer as God. Physico-theological arguments appear in the *Old* and *New Testament* (Psalms 19.2, Romans 1.19–20) and in the *Koran* (31.20), in Plato's *Timaeus* (28a–31b), Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (I.q.2.a.3). Also John Ray (1627–1705), William Derham (1657–1735), and Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) held versions of this proof in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

1011 ("plus x") but will have the "natural tendency to 'go on' with 1002", that is, the pupil will have a natural tendency to follow the rule "add 2" (Ginsborg 2014, 267). Similarly, she thinks, organisms have an intrinsic natural tendency or capacity to develop and to go on in the way they ought to, even though they do not have the capacity of reason and, thus, the possibility to choose and set ends and to follow natural purposes intentionally, that is rationally.[2]

1.2 Nature Is a Product of Divine Design

In contrast, Joseph Schmucker (1983, 5–10, 43–54) emphasizes Kant's positive, benevolent attitude towards divine design and the physico-theological argument in the *Ground of Proof* essay, despite its lack of geometrical strength and mathematical certainty. Also Regina dell'Oro (1994, 13–46) thinks that Kant defends the notion of nature as product of divine design from his early essays on optimism, to the *Ground of Proof* essay and Kant's first *Critique.* Though her book does not contain an analysis of Kant's writings after 1781/7, Dell'Oro (1994, 32–3) shows that between the mid 1750s and 1781 Kant argues relatively consistently that some sort of intrinsic contingency prevents nature from the causation of the end-directed and purposive form (adaptivity, beauty) of nature, and necessitates the work of a divine desginer who causes the end-directed forms of nature. According to Dell'Oro, Kant argues, for instance in the *Ground of Proof* essay, that our common sense "observses the flux and finitude of nature" and creation "reveals itself as radically contingent", but we also observe "the harmonious unity and purposeful arrangements which the universe exhibits" (Dell'Oro 1994, 33). Because the material foundation of nature is in no way capable of bringing together these purposeful arrangements in nature, Dell'Oro writes, one has to conclude "that there must be a Creator whose goodness and intelligence are mirrored in and through contingent things" (Dell'Oro 1994, 33–4).[3]

---

2 Amit Kravitz (2017) and Bernd Dörflinger (2010) have, for different reasons, also rejected the divine design of nature in Kant's third *Critique.* Though they agree that Kant has moral-practical reasons for a regulative assumption of God, both deny that the order, fine-tuning, adaptedness, and beauty of nature can provide such evidence.

3 One could mention also Hans-Joachim Waschkies (1987, 486–611) who defends the notion of divine design in Kant's *Theory of Heavens*, and John McFarland (1970, 1–24), Giovanni Sala (1990, 426–50), Paul Guyer (2014, 221–2), and myself (Goy 2017, 251–84) who emphasize the importance of physico-theology or divine design in Kant's *CPJ*.

2 Variants of Physico-theological or Design Arguments in Kant's Writings

In order to answer the question whether nature for Kant is a product of divine design, I would like to analyze now four phases of Kant's design argument in the *Theory of Heavens* (1755), Kant's *Ground of Proof* essay (1763), Kant's first (1781/7) and his third *Critiques* (1790). I would like to show that Kant develops a variety of physico-theological or design arguments and that he changes the premises of the design argument in accordance with his changing concepts of the order of nature. Despite being aware of the logical flaws of the argument Kant always praises it as one of the oldest and perseverative arguments for the existence of God and appreciates its undeniable beauty and irresistible appeal to the common sense.[4]

2.1 *Theory of Heavens*

A first variant of a Kant's design argument we can find in the *Theory of Heavens* (1:228.3–230.26, 1:331.21–347.32) published in 1755. In this early cosmological approach Kant develops the design argument in the context of a mechanistic conception of nature. He identifies marks of divine design in the most simple mechanical powers and laws of the macrocosmos (nature at a large scale) and the unity and order that they bring about. Kant notes:

> Matter, which is the orginal material of all things, is [...] bound by certain laws, and if it is left freely to these laws, it must necessarily bring forth beautiful combinations. It is not at liberty to deviate from this plan of perfection. Since, therefore, it [matter] is subject to a most wise purpose, it must necessarily have been placed into such harmonious connections by a first cause that rules over it, and *a God exists precisely because nature cannot behave in any way other then in a regular and orderly manner, even in chaos* (*UNTH* 1:228.3–11).

In 1755 Kant thinks that God implants the most simple and universal laws of motion into an originally chaotic matter. Once impressed into matter, these laws bring about the heavenly bodies as simple spherical masses and their orbital motions. The latter remain unmixed and simple due to the spatial width and emptiness of the universe. That is, in 1755, only the most simple and universal laws of matter

---

4 See, for instance, *Ground of Proof* 2:160.8–13 (Kant names the argument here "cosmological", but what he desrcibes is the physico-theological argument), *CPR* A 623–3/B 651–2, and *CPJ* 5:476.34–477.2.

stem from the direct hand of God. But once implanted, they (and not God) cause the mechanisms of the macrocosmos, and nature itself forms itself out of chaos into a perfect constitution (*UNTH* 1:229.6–8, 18–37); the divine designer does not interfere with the world any further.[5] Kant argues that if the laws of nature would not bring about order and beauty but disorder and chaos only, and if all order of nature would require the direct hand of God, the entire constitution of the world would have the character of miracles (*UNTH* 1:332.35–333.3).

The young Kant is convinced that this account satisfies both, the needs of the theologican and that of the natural scientist, since it neither neglects God's creation nor the autonomy of nature entirely.[6] Kant's notion of a devine designer is constitutive at this point, which means that he claims the objective validity of this notion, and the Kant of 1755 is not critical of the design argument in view of its failing inductive structure as in later years.

2.2 *Ground of Proof* Essay

In the *Ground of Proof* essay (2:123.15–137.7), published in 1763,[7] Kant again develops the design argument within the context of a mechanical account of nature, how-

---

5 Waschkies (1987, 486–611) gives us a detailed account of this generative story.

6 See also *UNTH* 1:333.29–334.7: "Nature, left to its own universal properties, is fertile in many beautiful and perfect fruits which not only show correspondence and excellence in themselves but also harmonize with the entire realism of their beings, with the usefulness to mankind and the glorification of the divine properties. From this it follows that their essential properties can have no independent necessity, but rather that they must have their origin in a single understanding as the ground and source of all beings, and in which they have been designed under mutual relations. All things that relate to one another in a reciprocal harmony must be combined with each other in a single being on which they all depend. Therefore, there is a being of all beings, an infinite understanding and self-sufficient wisdom, out of which nature also draws its origin in the entire sum total of its determinations, even according to its possibility."

7 In the *Ground of Proof* essay, especially in the second Section, Kant intends to present an improved notion of divine design. In order to develop such an improved notion, he analyzes facets of the relations between the divine and natural orders. He asks himself whether and what it would mean if divine design would imply a moral or non-moral dependency of things upon God. The dependency of things upon God would be moral, if God's will (and voluntary choice) would be the ground of the existence of things. The dependency of things upon God would be non-moral, if God would contain even the internal possibility of things and their adaptation to harmony and unity as a whole (*GP* 2:103.20–8).

Kant considers further if and in which form things are caused by supernatural causes, and would be subject of divine design, or would be caused by natural causes, and whether supernatural causes would need collaborating natural causes, and if so, in which form. Things belong to the

ever this account is more refined. Kant now claims that marks of divine design appear not only in the most simple and universal mechanisms of the macrocosmos (nature at a large scale) but in the unity of the highly complex minor mechanisms in the microcosmos also (nature at a small scale), in what he later calls 'organized beings' (*GP* 2:126.5–127.8).

Kant notes that natural things can belong to a contingent or to a necessary natural (mechanical) order. The (mechanical) order of nature is necessary in those instances "where the principle of harmony with one law is precisely the same principle which renders other laws necessary as well" (*GP* 2:106.13–14), or, as Kant puts it in another passage, where we can find a "necessary unity in the relation between a simple ground and a multiplicity of appropriate consequences" (*GP* 2:107.24–5). Kant thinks that this kind of order of nature exists mainly in "inorganic nature" (*GP* 2:107.23). He illustrates this with two examples. First, "the self-same elasticity and pressure of air, which is the ground of the laws of respiration, is also of necessity the ground of the possibility of pumps, of the generation of clouds, of the maintenance of fire, of the winds, and so on" (*GP* 2:106.15–18). Second,

> it is not one set of causes which gives the earth its spherical form, and another which prevents bodies flying off the earth as a result of the centrifugal force of its rotation, and yet another again which keep the moon in its orbit. Gravity by itself is a cause which is, of necessity, sufficient to produce all these effects (*GP* 2:106.33–107.1).

In contrast, the (mechanical) order of nature is contingent "if the ground of the effects of a certain kind, which are similar, according to one law, is not at the same time the ground of effects of a different kind in the same being, according to another law" (*GP* 2:106.20–3). This contingent (mechanical) order of nature is present mainly in organic nature: in plants, animals, and humans insofar they

---

supernatural order and are designed, if they are dependent upon God in either a material or formal way. Things would be materially supernatural (designed) if their immediate efficient cause would be external to nature, that is, if the divine power would produce and design them immediately. They would be formally supernatural, if the manner in which the forces of nature would be directed to producing the effect would not itself be subject to a rule of nature, but would presuppose God, the divine designer. If things would be formally supernatural God could use natural causes as collaborating causes for the sake of producing effects. Things would belong to the natural order, if their existence or alternation would be sufficiently grounded in the forces of nature, that is, if the forces of nature would be the efficient causes of the things, and if the manner in which the forces of nature would be directed to the production of an effect would be sufficiently grounded in a rule of the natural laws of causality (*GP* 2:103.27–104.7).

are natural beings. Kant's example is: "Human beings see, hear, smell and taste, and so on. But the properties which are the grounds of seeing are not the grounds of tasting as well" (*GP* 2:106.26–7). Another example is, that in an eye, "the part which permits light to enter is different from the part which refracts it, and the part which receives the image" (*GP* 2:106.31–2). Finally, in plants and animals, "vessels, which draw up sap, vessels which take in air, those which process sap and those which exhale it [...] make up a great manifold, where non is capable of producing the effects of the others" (*GP* 2:107.16–19).

Kant argues that even though both parts of nature, the (mechanical) organic and the (mechanical) inorganic parts of nature, are designed, the inorganic part has more autonomy since in this part of nature much order and unity can be brought about by simple, comprehensive mechanical natural laws. The order and unity of the other, (mechanical) organic part of nature, however, requires stronger divine interventions, since the (mechanical) organic nature in its complexity and subtlety cannot give itself enough unity and harmony, and needs divine choice and will in order to achieve a unified form (*GP* 2:106.1–108.7). Kant's divine designer in 1763 is both, the ground of the beauty and order of the contingent and of the necessary mechanical characteristics of nature (*GP* 2:116.11–18, *GP* 2:117.1–3). In this Kant sees an improvement of the design argument.

Kant's notion of a divine designer in 1763 is constitutive and objective as in the *Theory of Heavens*, but Kant is more critical about it than in 1755. A first critical point is, that although the inclusion of (mechanical) organic orders as marks of divine design enlarge the evidence and, thus, improve the strength of the design argument, the design argument is at the same time defective. Its main logical failure consists in the derivation of a non-empirical conclusion, the idea of God as a divine designer, from empirical premises, the observable beauty and order of (the contingent and necessary mechanisms of inorganic and organic) nature (*GP* 2:161.4–19). A second critical point is that also in 1763 Kant argues against permanent divine interventions in the world, especially in the form of miracles (*GP* 2:108.15–23). For this reason it must be unsatisfying for Kant that the (mechanical) organic part of nature, once created, cannot bring about its unified order in natural ways and requires ongoing divine interventions.

2.3 First *Critique*

In 1781/7 Kant is openly opposed to a variant of the physico-theological or design argument held by unnamed traditional defenders. He describes its "chief moments" as follows:

1) Everywhere in the world there are clear signs of an order according to determinate aim, carried out with great wisdom, and in a whole of indescribable manifoldness in content as well as of unbounded magnitude in scope. 2) This purposive order is quite foreign to the things in the world, and pertains to them only contingently, i.e., the natures of different things could not by themselves agree in so many united means to determinate final aims, were they not quite properly chosen for and predisposed to it through a principle of rational order grounded on ideas. 3) Thus there exists a sublime and wise cause (or several) which must be the cause of the world not merely as an all-powerful nature working blindly through fecundity, but as an intelligence through freedom. 4) The unity of this cause may be inferred from the unity of the reciprocal relation of the parts of the world as members of an artful structure, inferred with certainty wherever our observation reaches, but beyond that with probability in accordance with all principles of analogy (*CPR* A 625–6/B 653–4).

According to Kant's *CPR* version of the argument, unnamed traditional defenders of physico-theology claim that the observation of nature (the world) reveals purposive order(s) that seem to indicate a grounding of these end-directed orders in a rational and wise organization. But nature (the world) itself cannot account for the causation of these purposive orders since everything in nature (in the world) is contingent and happens by chance. Thus, the defenders of the argument conclude that there must be one or several causes of nature (the world) whose wisdom, intelligence, and will bring about the purposive orders of nature (the world). Finally, defenders of the argument claim that this kind of cause(s) can be understood by means of an analogy of the divine designer to a human craftsman: the divine designer produces its objects (things in nature, in the world) like a human artisan who deliberately subdues the contingent mechanisms of matter to its intentional, rational purposes. Possibly there are several divine designers.

Much has changed since the *Ground of Proof* essay. The Kant of the *Theory of Heavens* and the *Ground of Proof* essay speaks of one God only. In 1781/7 in contrast, the divine designer, or any number of them, are probably anthropomorphic, but in any case intelligent and intentionally acting beings, singular or plural. They "cause […] the world not merely as an all-powerful nature working blindly through fecundity", that is the divine being or several of them are not only the maker(s) of the mechanisms of the cosmos, but are the cause(s) of the purposive, end-directed order of the "things in the world" as well (*CPR* A 625–6/B 653–4). The divine designer or several of them bring about the world in accordance with both, mechanical and, and this emphasis is new, teleological (purposive, end-directed) laws since the particular things of the world cannot account for these orders themselves. Also in this variant of the argument, mechanism as cosmic order indicates divine design but Kant is less sensitive to distinctions of minor and major, more and less complicated mechanisms of the cosmos at a small or large scale as distinct mechanical indicators of divine design. Instead of minor mechanisms of the cosmos that

had to explain the complex structures of organized beings in the *Ground of Proof* essay, Kant now mentions the purposive or teleological order of things as an additional mark of divine design. Since nature has no reason and thus no capacity to cause its end-directed orders, the purposiveness of nature indicates the work of the mind of one or several divine designers. Both, the mechanical and the teleological orders have a universal scope, one or several divine designers are responsible as much for a universal mechanism as for a teleological holism. What Kant exactly means by these mechanical and teleological orders cannot be extracted easily from the text of the first *Critique*, especially since Kant seems to relate this account of physico-theology not to his own philosophy but to other positions (and their accounts of God or Gods and laws of nature). The notion of one or several divine designers in this traditional physico-theological argument is constitutive.

In 1781/7, Kant is in his most destructive phase in view of the physico-theological argument. A famous paraphrase shows how Kants challenges the soundness of the metaphysical and logical structure of the argument:

> After one has gotten as far as admiring the magnitude of the wisdom, power, etc. of the world's author, and cannot get any farther, then one suddenly leaves this argument carried out on empirical grounds of proof and goes back to the contingency that was inferred right at the beginning from the world's order and purposiveness. Now one proceeds from this contingency alone, solely through transcendental concepts, to the existence of something necessary, and then from the concept of the absolute necessity of the first cause to its thouroughly determinate or determining concept, namely that of an all-encompassing reality. Thus the physico-theological proof [...] suddenly jumps over to the cosmological proof, and since this is only a concealed ontological proof, it really carries through its aim merely through pure reason, even though at the beginning this denied all kinship with it and had proposed to base everything on evident proofs from experience. (*CPR* A 629/B 657)

Kant now claims that the physico-theological argument is grounded on the cosmological, and the cosmological on the ontological argument, and shows that the ontological and the cosmological arguments are false. In this destructive criticism Kant picks up an idea that he had presented in the *Ground of Proof* essay already, namely that the physico-theological argument rests on the derivation of a non-empirical conclusion, the existence of God, from empirical premises, the observable purposive order of nature/ the world. The argument "begin[s] from determinate experience and the special constitution of our world of sense known through it, and ascend[s] from that by means of laws of causality to the highest cause outside the world" (*CPR* A 590/B 618).[8] This logical flaw is now so pressing in Kant's eyes that he refutes the argument.

---

8 A very similar formulation can be found in *CPR* A 620/B 648: A "determinate experience, that of

In this phase of Kant's views on physico-theology, it seems, Ginsborg (2014) would find most support (outside the *CPJ*) for her claim that Kant denies the divine design of nature. But against this one could hold that in the first *Critique* Kant opposes other people's physico-theological argument and not a potential alternative physico-theological argument that he himself could have held at this time. That Kant opposes one version of the argument does not necessarily mean that he could not hold another, functioning variant of it. It thus seems to be an interesting question, if Kant could have formulated another, less vulnerable physico-theological argument based on the concepts of God and nature that he himself held around 1781. If so, Ginsborg's claim that Kant overall denies the divine design of nature could be seen as misguided by the fact that at the time of the *CPR* Kant refutes a traditional variant of the argument that is not his own variant of the physico-theological argument.

But it is not easy to say which notion of nature Kant holds at the time of the first *Critique.* The first *Critique*, as a metaphysical and epistemological treatise, contains no detailed account of the mechanisms of (inorganic and organic) nature and the way in which they serve as marks of divine design as in the *Ground of Proof* essay. Instead, Kant spells out a small set of highly general laws that constitute objects of experience as such, and thus also natural objects (*CPR* A 148–236/B 187–294) but that are no laws of nature specifically since they concern all objects of experience as such, also non-natural (artificial) ones.[9] Kant addresses his account of

---

the beings in the present world, their constitution and order, yields a ground of proof that could help us to acquire a certain conviction of the existence of a highest being".

9 These laws of understanding are 1. "All appearances are, as regards their intuition, *extensive magnitudes*" (*CPR* A 162) or "*All intuitions are extensive magnitudes*" (*CPR* B 202), 2. "In all appearances the sensation and the *real*, which corresponds to it in the object [...], has an *intensive magnitude*, i. e., a degree" (*CPR* A 165) or "*In all appearances the real, which is an object of the sensation, has intensive magnitude*, i. e., a degree" (*CPR* B 207), 3.1 "All appearances contain that which persists (*substance*) as the object itself, and that which can change as its mere determination, i. e., a way in which the objects exist" (*CPR* A 182) or "In all change of appearances substance persists, and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished in nature" (*CPR* B 224), 3.2 "Everything that happens (begins to be) presupposes something which it follows in accordance with a rule" (*CPR* A 189) or "All alternations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect" (*CPR* B 232), 3.3. "All substances, insofar as they are *simultaneous*, stand in thoroughgoing community (i. e., interaction with one another)" or "All substances, insofar as they can be perceived in space as simultaneous, are in thoroughgoing interaction", 4.1 "Whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts) is *possible*", 4.2 "That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is *actual*", and 4.3 "That whose connection with the actual is determined in accordance with general conditions of experience is (exists) *necessarily*" (*CPR* A 218/B 265–6).

laws of nature most explicitely in his discussion of the third anitnomy. There he explains the "causality" in accordance with the "laws of nature" as follows:

> [E]verything *that happens* presupposes a previous state, opon which it follows without exception according to a rule. But now the previous state itself must be something that has happened (come to be in a time when it previously was not) [...]. Thus the causality of the cause through which something happens is always something *that has happened*, which according to the law of nature presupposes once again a previous state and its causality, and this in the same way a still earlier state, and so on. If, therefore, everything happens according to mere laws of nature, then at every time there is only a subordinate but never a first beginning, and thus no completeness of the series on the side of the causes descending one from another (*CPR* A 444–6/B 472–4).

The main characteristc of what Kant calls 'law of nature' in 1781 is a causal series that explains an effect by means of a preceding cause. Since the preceding cause itself needs another explanation by a preceding cause, laws of nature have the flaw that they cannot provide an completable explanation or give a finite answer to the question why something exists. It is clear from this picture that laws of nature are higly general laws that deal with most universal characteristics of objects of experience as such, namely their causal history. A causal series of this kind is what Kant calls in the later *CPJ* (5:372.19–24, 5:374.21–6, 5:387.3–5) 'nexus effectivus' (efficient causation), 'mechanism' or 'mechanical law'. Apart from that Kant is widely silent about more specific mechanisms as laws of nature.

In addition, in the *CPR* passage "On the Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason", Kant develops an account of teleological laws—primarily in the context of his doctrine of ideas of reason and of the systematic unity in the contingent empirical manifoldness of things that reason tries to find by means of these ideas. This account of teleological laws concerns a holistic view of the world, but not specifically of nature as such or of individual organisms that are teleologically ordered (*CPR* A 669–88/B 697–716):[10] Kant explains in great detail how a family of natural

---

10 It is also important to keep in mind that there are other writings before the *CPR*, in which Kant discusses his notion of nature. Kant had written the essay *On the Different Races of Human Beings* in 1775 before the first edition of the first *Critique* in 1781, and the *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race* in 1785 after the first but before the second edition of the first *Critique* in 1787. A third essay on races, *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy*, appeared in the year after the publication of the second edition of the first *Critique* in 1788. In all three essays Kant develops a teleological notion of nature, in the first two essays still implicitly and in the context of historical debates of his time, in the last one explicitly, in the context of his own transcendental, critical philosophy. In addition, in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, published between the two earliest editions of the first *Critique* (1781/7) in 1786, Kant describes the mechanical (phoronomical, dynamical, mechanical, and phenomenological) natural powers and laws, such as the powers of attraction and

beings can be divided into various genera, each genera again into a variety of species, each species again into a variety of subspecies, and so on (*CPR* A 650–1/B 679–80), whereby "the logical horizon" of the broader sphere, e.g. that of a family of natural beings, contains the "smaller horizons" of the narrower spheres, e.g. that of various genera (*CPR* A 658–9/B 686–7). In turn several subspecies can be unified in the notion of the purpose of a species, several species in the notion of the purpose of a genus, and several genera in the notion of the purpose of the family. This ordering is teleological since the predicates with which humans characterize families, genera, species, and subspecies are notions of purposes.[11]

This account of teleological laws in the *CPR* passage "On the Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason" is interesting also in view of Kant's regulative account of physico-theology that he officially advocates not before 1790. In the antinomy of teleological judgment in the third *Critique* Kant claims that humans use both, mechanical and natural teleological laws, in order to explain individual organisms as natural purposes. Though Kant briefly mentions that such a mechanical-teleological order applies to nature as a whole also (*CPJ* 5:377.24–381.7), he does not clarify in detail how and in which way teleological orders help us to understand nature in its entirety as a unified, teleological system. But one could say that Kant had provided details of such an account in the *CPR*, in his description of the subordination of subspecies to species, species to genera, and genera to families, that is of lower, less general to higher, more general teleological orders.

Is it possible to link Kant's *CPR* account of mechanical and teleological explanations of nature to his own positive *CPR* account of God, so that characteristics of nature that can be explained by these two kinds of natural laws indicate marks of divine design ? In the *CPR* passage the "Ideal of Pure Reason" (*CPR* A 567–642/B 569–670) Kant develops a regulative, hypothetical, theoretical notion of God—a God who may or may not exist, but, Kant claims, human reason has an interest in the former. This God serves as the "principle of *thoroughgoing determination*" of things "according to which, among *all possible* predicates of *things*, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it" (*CPR* A 571–2/B 599–600). The divine principle of unity, a universal 'predicate pool', enables the tel-

---

repulsion (*MFNS* 4:498.17–25) and the general laws of motion and rest (*MFNS* 4:541.27–30, *MFNS* 4:543.15–20, *MFNS* 4:544.31–3).

11 Contemporary classificatory systems may distinguish the species, genus, subfamily, family, order, class, phylum, and kingdom of an animal. For example: a sheep of the species *ovis aries* or domestic sheep is subordinate to the genus *ovis*, the genus *ovis* is subordinate to the the the subfamily *caprinae*, the subfamily *caprinae* again to the family *bovidae*, the *bovidae* family is subordinate to the order *artiodactyla*, the order *artiodactyla* to the class *mammalia*, the class *mammalia* to the phylum *cordata*, and the phylum *cordata* is subordinate to the kingdom *animalia.*

eological order and systematic classification of natural beings. Kant suggests that the predicates by means of which human reason characterizes the various levels of generalizations that classify natural beings, e.g. as families, genera, species, and subspecies, are all contained in the regulative idea of God as a predicate pool. (But one could press such a potential Kantian account further: would this notion of God as a predicate pool still be a physico-theological notion? And if so, would it be less vulnerable than the proof that Kant himself attacks?)

2.4 Third *Critique*

In the third *Critique* in 1790, Kant returns to the idea of divine design and reintroduces a further variant of the physico-theological or design argument (beside the ethicotheological argument) (*CPJ* 5:436.3–447.13). At this point, he develops the design argument in the context of an account of nature which is now far more explicitely no longer mechanical alone but natural telological as well. In the third *Critique* Kant recognizes marks of divine design in the order and beauty of nature which is caused by mechanical and teleological natural powers and laws and in the fit and appropriateness of the mechanisms for the purposes of organic nature.[12] One typical formulation of the third *Critique* account of divine design can be found, for instance, in §75 of the *CPJ*, where Kant notes that organisms or

> natural things which we find possible only as ends […] are the only basis for proof […] of the dependence of these things on and their origin in a being that exists outside of the world and is (on account of their purposive form) intelligent; thus teleology cannot find a complete answer for its inquiries except in a theology (*CPJ* 5:398.35–399.5).

In a related passage, Kant claims that we have to assume "an intentionally acting supreme cause" (*CPJ* 5:400.15–16), since we "cannot conceive of the purposiveness which must be made the basis […] of our cognition of the internal possibility of many things in nature […] except by representing them and the world in general as a product of an intelligent cause (a God)" (*CPJ* 5:400.1–6), that is, Kant claims that we have to assume a divine designer in order to account for the teleological form

---

12 The textual evidence for this new account of nature can be found in the §§61–8 where Kant introduces the two kinds of powers and laws of nature, but does not yet mention the notion of a divine designer (*CPJ* 5:360.6–361.11, *CPJ* 5:372.12–376.7). The latter is at the center of the "Dialectic" and "Methodology of the Teleological Power of Judgment" (*CPJ* 5:386.11–388.19, *CPJ* 5:405.1–415.22, *CPJ* 5:436.3–447.13).

of the mechanisms of nature, and in order to account for the generation of the world in general.

Significantly, with this move the divine designer of the third *Critique* is reduced again to a creator who is active at the beginning of creation, but does not permanently interfere with the world, neither in order to maintain the mechanical nor in order to perpetuate the natural teleological orders of nature. God's permanent intervention is also not needed for the adaptation of the mechanisms of nature to natural purposes, since this finetuning lies in the power of natural teleological laws themselves: the formative power directs the mechanisms of nature towards natural purposes (*CPJ* 5:375.21–6). Kant elaborates details of this minimalist notion of a divine designer in §§76–7 and in §85 where he shows that in order to account for the fit of mechanical and natural teleological powers and laws of organized nature humans presuppose the unity of both kinds of powers and laws in the intuitive understanding of the divine designer.[13] God guarantees the unity of these laws as a harmonious ultimate ground but not like a watchmaker who permanently has to repair and readjust the misfitting parts of his imperfect clock. With this Kant can get rid of the abundant use of divine design in the *Ground of Proof* essay that he had employed in order to explain how the complicated multiple mechanisms of (mechanical) organic nature can achieve their unified order.

It is interesting to see also that and how the Kant of 1790 deals more successfully with objections to the design argument. Kant addresses his views on physicotheology and popular criticisms of the design argument most explicitly in §85. At the surface, §85 is by far one of the messiest sections of Kant's *CPJ:* besides statements in which Kant seems to approve the design argument we can find statements in which he seems to share the Humean traditional criticisms or seems to suggest that the physico-theological or design argument is in truth only a physicoteleological argument. But considered and analyzed more deeply one can see that the reason for this extremely confused part of Kant's text is (so I at least believe) that Kant was not already clearly but subliminally aware of the fact that in 1790 he had actually found a variant of the design argument that allowed him to overcome the logical gap in the argument and the related Humean criticisms. How so?

As mentioned, according to Kant's *CPJ* account, marks of divine design can be found in the orders of nature that are caused by created, mechanical and teleological natural powers and laws. The recognition of marks of divine design in orders

---

13 And in §85 Kant explicitly presents a physico-theological or design argument which proves the regulative hypothesis of a divine designer ("Physico-theology is the attempt of reason to infer from the ends of nature (which can be cognized only empirically) to the supreme cause of nature and its properties" *CPJ* 5:436.5–7).

that are caused by natural teleological laws allows Kant to no longer ground the design argument on a posteriori, empirical premises only, but on a priori, non-empirical premises also, since teleological laws of nature contain the concept of the necessary unity of a natural purpose, which is an a priori, non-empirical concept. What exactly does this mean? Imagine a natural teleological law. It would say something like: 'Consider all mechanical features of a wing of a bird as if they were there for the sake of flying'. A natural teleological law contains the notion of a natural purpose—flying in this case. Though natural purposes are a posteriori and empirical concepts, they do represent the idea of the non-empirical, a priori necessary unity of all properties that fall under the idea of a natural purpose. Kant describes the structure of the notion of natural purposes more closely in §74 of the *CPJ:*

> The concept of a thing as a natural end [...] is certainly an empirically conditioned concept, i. e., one that is possible only under certain conditions given in experience, but it is still not a concept that can be abstracted from experience, but one that is possible only in accordance with a principle of reason in the judging of the object (*CPJ* 5:396.7–11).

This principle of reason is the idea of the necessary unity of the characteristics of nature in the notion of a natural purpose (which is no empirical notion). Which means: as soon as Kant uses orders that are caused by natural teleological laws as marks of divine design, he moves the premise of the physico-theological argument partly from the empirical a posteriori into the non-empirical a priori realm, a move, that enables Kant to close the logical gap in the physico-theological argument and to validly derive a conclusion from the *a priori* moment in the notion of the designed to the *a priori* notion of its designer. This modification of the design argument allows Kant to overcome both, his own deconstruction of the argument in the first *Critique* and some of the traditional Humean criticisms of the argument that Kant was all too well aware of. But what is also visible at this point is that the derivation of the a priori notion/ idea of a designer from the a priori notion/ idea of the designed makes the entire argument hypothetical. The divine designer of the third *Critique* clearly is a regulative, hypothetical notion only, that is, it is a notion of a being whose existence can be neither answered into the positive nor into the negative (*CPJ* 5:399.6–401.2).

3 Objections

One could object, firstly, that this new design argument of the third *Critique* does not actually close the logical gap but does shift the gap only to a different place in

the argument. The traditional physico-theological argument begins with the beauty, purposiveness, and fine-tuning found in the empirical observations of nature and concludes that there must be a non-empirical, supernatural ground and cause of this beauty, purposiveness, and fine-tuning of nature, since nature's contingency cannot account for it. The gap in the argument is the transition from nature to the supernatural, from empirical observations to an entity as their cause (God) that cannot be observed empirically at all. In Kant's modified variant of the physico-theological argument a similar gap appears, it seems, but at a different place in the argument. It appears now in the transition from characteristics of nature that can be observed empirically, the mechanisms of nature, to those that cannot be observed empirically, at least not entirely, natural purposes, whereby natural purposes cause and hypothetically explain the unified end-directed form of the mechanisms of nature. The argument concludes further that hypothetical natural purposes as supernatural causes within nature have themselves a unifying hypothetical supernatural cause outside of nature.

In defense of Kant's new variant of the physico-theological argument one could say at least that this variant was not under attack by criticisms of Kant's time, that is, criticisms that Kant was familiar with, and someone would have had to pose a new challenge against Kant's argument in order to threaten it. Such an attack could have been that if natural purposes are not actual, the beauty, purposiveness, and fine-tuning that Kant is referring to in nature does not exist. How, then, conclude from something non-existent (the purposiveness of organized nature) to something that exists even less (God)? Kant could have responded that he neither claims the actuality of purposes in nature nor the actuality of God's existence, but uses both as hypotheses to serve an interest of reason, namely to bring unity into the empircial manifoldness of the otherwise contingent characteristics of organized nature.

On could object, secondly, that the design argument of the third *Critique* is in its core completely hypothetical, and thus, very weak; it just draws a hypothetical conclusion from a hypothetical premise. And is it not possible to derive pretty much everything from mere hypotheses and ideas? In order to defend Kant's argument against this objection one could use his distinction between necessary and unneccesary hypotheses. Necessary hypotheses are holistic ideas of reason. Reason is essentially interested in such ideas since they unify, order, and structure human knowledge of the realm of experience (*CPR* A 323/B 380, *CPR* A 327/B 383, *CPR* A 338/B 395). Unnecessary hypotheses in contrast are ideas of impossible objects or entities like squared circles, or ideas of fantasy objects such as unicorns or Empedoclean monstrosities. Reason is not interested in unneccesary ideas since they are either impossible at all as much in the realm of experience as in the realm of thought, and do not allow any knowledge or insight (*CPJ* 5:467.15–20), or are

ideas of impossible, "arbitrarily invented" (*CPR* A 327/B 384) combinations of objects that belong to the realm of experience or of their parts. Neither of both support reason's natural interest in unifying, ordering, and structuring human knowledge of objects of experience.

4 Critical Assessment

Although Ginsborg has never suggested it herself, her account of primitive normativity can be read as a subtle interpretation of Kant's notion of "formative power (bildende Kraft)" in §65 of the *CPJ* (5:374.21–6). This formative power indeed is a *natural* capacity in organized beings that causes their teleological form, that is, it is a *natural* power that lets organisms "go on" in the way they are supposed to or ought to. Ginsborg's notion of primitive normativity also fits well with some (more local) remarks in the "Analytic of the Teleological Power of Judgment", for instance, Kant's claim that the teleological form of organized beings does not rely on an "artist (a rational being)" outside of nature (*CPJ* 5:374.29–30) and that the generation of this form has no "analogue" in art production (*CPJ* 5:374.28–9), which implies straihtforwardly that it has no analogue in divine art production, that is, divine design (claims that Kant himself takes back in later passages of the text). Apart from that, Ginsborg's reading harmonizes with Kant's general ambition to reduce nature's dependency on divine powers and to strengthen the autonomy of nature. And Ginsborg's reductionism is certainly attractive for modern readers who will find a regulative theological framework of Kant's account of organized beings outdated and redundant.

However, a major disadvantage of Ginsborg's reading is that it ignores all those (less local) passages in Kant's *CPJ* account of organisms in which he embeds it explicitely into a regulative theological framework, passages, which we find mainly in the "Dialectic" and in §§85–91 of the "Methodology of the Teleological Power of Judgment". In the "Dialectic" Kant explains that the unifiability and fit of mechanical and teleological laws of nature requires "a highest ground", namely "an original understanding as cause of the world" (*CPJ* 5:410.11) which is external to the world, and in the "Methodology" Kant explicitly poses a physico-theological or design argument according to which the divine designer is responsible for the creation of the mechanical and natural teleological powers and laws of nature and, in the context of the latter, in some way also for the intelligent and intentional characteristics of nature (*CPJ* 5:438.6–7, *CPJ* 5:440.22, *CPJ* 5:441.3). Ginsborg's interpretation overstates Kant's ambition to reduce the divine design, since Kant tries only to decrease the influence of the divine designer but does not try to nullify him (or her). Ginsborg's reading also ignores Kant's enduring praise and ambition to mod-

ify and improve the design argument despite its well-known flaws and weaknesses, of which Dell'Oro (1994), Schmucker (1983), Waschkies (1987), and other scholars have given us convincing descriptions. These scholars have justifiably emphasized the importance and consistency of the design argument in Kant's works.

Thus, I would like to suggest to embed Ginsborg's notion of primitive normativity as an interpretation of the third *Critique's* formative power into a slim, hypothetical concept of divine design, and in this way combine Ginsborg's astute reading of the formative power with the approval of the divine design that traditional interpreters like Waschkies, Schmucker, Dell'Oro, or me suggest. Ginsborg would then have to agree with the modification that the primitive normativity, though a natural capacity to "go on" in the right way, is created, and is, though itself not intentional, active in harmony with the intentions of a hypothetically existing divine designer. Ginsborg would not like that, since she has rejected also the hypothetical notion of divine design (Ginsborg 2014, 264) but this modification would help her reading out of the extreme reductionist niche and the twisted situation that she offers a Kant interpretation that is to a far extent against Kant's text. In turn, traditionalist interpreters could draw the line of functioning design arguments in Kant even further, beyond the first to the third *Critique*, and could use Ginsborg's illuminating notion of primitive normativity as the way in which Kant spells out nature's autonomy within the context of a hypothetical notion of divine design in the third *Critique*.

References

Dell'Oro, Regina, *From Existence to Ideal. Continuity and Development in Kant's Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

Derham, William, *Physico-Theology or a Demonstration of the Being and of the Attributes of God, from his Works of Creation: Being the Substance of Sixteen Sermons Preached in St. Mary-le-Bow-Church* (London: J. Innys, 1713).

Dörflinger, Bernd, "Kant über das Defizit der Physikotheologie und die Notwendigkeit einer Ethikotheologie," in *Die Gottesfrage in der Philosophie Kants*, ed. by Norbert Fischer and Maximilian Forschner (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 71–84.

Ginsborg, Hannah, "Oughts Without Intentions," in *Kant's Theory of Biology*, ed. by Ina Goy and Eric Watkins, (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 259–74.

Goy, Ina, "Kant's Theory of Biology and the Argument from Design," in *Kant's Theory of Biology*, ed. by Ina Goy and Eric Watkins (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 203–20.

Goy, Ina, *Kants Theorie der Biologie* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2017).

Goy, Ina, "Kant on Nonhuman Animals and God," in *Kant and Animals*, ed. by Lucy Allais and John Callanan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 89–104.

Guyer, Paul, "Freedom, Happiness, and Nature: Kant's Moral Teleology (*CPJ* §§83–4, 86–7)," in *Kant's Theory of Biology*, ed. by Ina Goy and Eric Watkins (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 221–37.

Kravitz, Amit, "Geht die Physikotheologie der Ethikotheologie vorher?," *Kant-Studien* 108.4 (2018), 568–88.

McFarland, John, *Kant's Concept of Teleology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

Plato, "Timaeus," in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1224–91.

Ray, John, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation Being the Substance of Some Common Places Delivered in the Chappel of Trinity-College, in Cambridge* (London: Printed for Samuel Smith, 1691).

Reimarus, Samuel, *Abhandlungen von den vornehmsten Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion* (Tübingen: Frank & Schramm, 1754, 1782, 5th ed.).

Sala, Giovanni B., *Kant und die Frage nach Gott: Gottesbeweise und Gottesbeweiskritik in den Schriften Kants* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1990).

Schmucker, Joseph, *Kants vorkritische Kritik der Gottesbeweise* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983).

Waschkies, Hans-Joachim, *Physik und Physikotheologie des jungen Kant. Die Vorgeschichte seiner Allgemeinen Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987).

Graham Oppy
Kant on 'the Cosmological Argument'

In this paper, I examine Kant's discussion of 'the cosmological argument' in the section "The Impossibility of a Cosmological Proof of the Existence of God" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 603/B 631). While there are other places where Kant provides related discussions of 'the cosmological argument'—e. g. in *The Only Possible Ground of Proof in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, *Lectures on Rational Theology*, and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*—I shall not attempt to consider any of these further works in this paper.[1]

1 First Pass

In roughest outline, Kant says that 'the cosmological argument' goes like this:
1. Necessarily, if something exists, then a necessary being exists. (Premise)
2. Something exists. (Lemma 1)
3. (Therefore) God exists. (From 1, 2, Lemma 2)

Lemma 1 goes like this:
1. I exist. (Premise)
2. (Therefore) Something exists. (From 1)

Lemma 2 goes like this:
1. A necessary being exists. (Premise)
2. (Therefore) God exists. (From 1)

Kant's critique of 'the cosmological argument' begins with Lemma 2. Kant claims that Lemma 2 'assumes' 'the ontological argument'. Kant does not tell us how 'the ontological argument' goes. He does refer to 'the famous ontological argument of Descartes'; but that is not sufficient to identify a single argument, i. e. a single premise set and conclusion.

Suppose we formulate Descartes' argument like this:
1. God is a perfect being. (Premise)

---

2. A perfect being has every perfection. (Premise)
3. Existence is a perfection. (Premise)
4. Whatever has existence exists. (Premise)
5. (Therefore) God exists. (From 1, 2, 3, and 4)

How, exactly, does the argument that Kant calls 'the cosmological argument' 'assume' this 'Cartesian argument'? Indeed, more generally, what could it be for one argument to 'assume' another argument?

The only plausible model, I think, is given in my formulation of what Kant calls 'the cosmological argument': one argument 'assumes' a second argument just in case it takes that second argument as a lemma.

If that is right, then an obvious question to ask is: how could Lemma 2 take anything like Descartes' ontological argument as a lemma? There is only one premise in Lemma 2, and it can be inferred from the major premise and Lemma 1 as follows:

1. Necessarily, if something exists, a necessary being exists. (Premise)
2. Something exists. (Premise)
3. (Therefore) a necessary being exists.

It is obvious to inspection that Lemma 2 does not take a Cartesian ontological argument as a lemma. So, on what looks like the only plausible construal of what it is for one argument to 'assume' another, it is not true that 'the cosmological argument' 'assumes' 'the ontological argument'.

This is not to say that Kant's initial criticism of 'the cosmological argument' is *entirely* without merit. There are three points at which 'the cosmological argument' is open to challenge. First, one might question the major premise. Second, one might challenge the validity of Lemma 2. Third, one might engage in wholesale repudiation of modality, or, at any rate, of *de re* modality.

There is plainly a serious question about the validity of Lemma 2. If we suppose, as Kant does, that to be God is to be an *ens realissimum*, a highest being, a being that possesses every perfection, then there is clearly a question to be asked about how we can justifiably infer from the mere necessity of a thing to its perfect goodness, perfect power, perfect wisdom, perfect justice, perfect mercy, and so forth. Why could it not be that, even though there are necessary things, there is no God?

All contemporary proponents of cosmological arguments feel the force of this question. None of them supposes that cosmological arguments are standalone arguments that demonstrate the existence of God. Rather, all recognise that further arguments must be wheeled in to show that the being whose existence is established by a given cosmological argument—a first cause, a necessary non-abstract

being, a ground of contingency, or whatever—possesses the familiar divine attributes.[2]

Kant says:

> What [a necessary] being might have in the way of properties, the empirical ground of proof cannot teach; rather, here reason says farewell to it entirely and turns its inquiry back to mere concepts: namely, to what kinds of properties in general an absolutely necessary being would have to have [...]. [R]eason believes it meets with these requisites solely and uniquely in the concept of a most real being, and so it infers: that is the absolutely necessary being. (*CPR* A 605/B 633)

Kant then adds:

> It is clear that here one presupposes that the concept of a being of the highest reality completely suffices for the concept of an absolute necessity of existence, i. e. that from the former the latter may be inferred—a proposition the ontological proof asserted, which one thus assumes in the cosmological proof. (*CPR* A 607/B 635)

What Kant says is clear here is anything but. As Kant says first up, what we want to know is what properties are essential to any necessary being. In particular, we would like to know whether the divine attributes are essential to a necessary being. But these questions are plainly distinct from questions about which properties are essential to God—to the being that has all and only the perfections as essential properties—and, in particular, to questions about whether necessary existence belongs to God. Answers to the first pair of questions are independent from—and make no 'presuppositions' concerning—answers to the second pair of questions.

Kant digs himself into a hole when he tries to clarify his claims "in a scholastically correct way" (*CPR* A 608/B 636). According to Kant, the claim that *every necessary being is a divine being* is 'convertible' with (1) the claim that *some divine being is a necessary being*; and (2) the claim that *every divine being is a necessary being*. That is, Kant claims (1a) *every necessary being is a divine being* entails *some divine being is a necessary being*; and (2a) *some divine being is a necessary being* entails *every divine being is a necessary being*. (The second entailment is allegedly supported by the observation that divine beings are indiscernible: 'one *ens realissimum* does not differ the least bit from another'.)

Recall that the conclusion of 'the cosmological argument' is that a divine being exists ('God exists'). We are worrying about the inference from 'a necessary being

2 See, for example, Craig (1979), Koons (1997), Gale and Pruss (1999), O'Connor (2008) and Pruss and Rasmussen (2018).

exists' to 'a divine being exists'. One way to make this inference secure would be to suppose that every necessary being is a divine being. But, despite Kant's claims to the contrary, one can suppose that every necessary being is a divine being without supposing either that some divine being is a necessary being or that every divine being is a necessary being. It is simply not true that *every necessary being is a divine being* entails *some divine being is a necessary being*; and, even if it is (necessarily) true that there is at most one divine being, it is simply not true that *every necessary being is a divine being* entails *every divine being is a necessary being.*

True enough, given that there is a necessary being, that there is at most one divine being, and that every necessary being is a divine being, it follows that every divine being is a necessary being. The following argument is valid:

1. There is a necessary being. (Premise)
2. There is at most one divine being. (Premise)
3. Every necessary being is a divine being. (Premise)
4. (Therefore) Every divine being is a necessary being. (From 1, 2, and 3)

But even if you think that the claim that every divine being is a necessary being is the *nervus probandi* of 'the ontological argument', and even if you also think that you can infer this claim from other claims that figure in 'the cosmological argument', it simply does not follow that 'the cosmological argument' 'assumes' 'the ontological argument'.

The (provisional) upshot of this first rough pass through Kant's initial criticism of 'the cosmological argument' is that the criticism misfires: Kant does not here provide a cogent critique of 'the cosmological argument'. While he does focus on a genuine weak point in cosmological arguments—the gap between the existence of a first cause (a necessary non-abstract being, a ground of contingency) and the existence of God—he does not provide compelling reason for supposing that this gap in 'the cosmological argument' is unbridgeable.

2 Second Pass

While I think that my first rough pass through Kant's initial criticism of 'the cosmological argument' may be fine as far as it goes, there is much that can be done to smooth away rough edges. I begin with some observations about my use of 'scare quotes' around the expressions 'the cosmological argument' and 'the ontological argument'.

Anybody who knows anything about arguments about the existence of God knows that there are many very different ontological arguments and many very different cosmological arguments. Among ontological arguments, Anselm's *Proslo-*

gion 2 argument, Descartes' *Meditation V* argument, Gödel's higher-order argument, Plantinga's modal argument, and many others, have different conclusions and very different premise sets. Similarly, among cosmological arguments, the various kalām arguments, the first three of Aquinas' five ways, Leibniz's *Origins* argument, the more recent arguments of Koons, Gale and Pruss, O'Connor, Pruss and Rasmussen, and many others, also have different conclusions and very different premise sets.[3]

There are very different considerations that arise in connection with different ontological arguments and different cosmological arguments. For each distinct premise set and conclusion, there is a distinct question about validity. While, in principle, it can be that distinct ontological arguments or distinct cosmological arguments share the same logical form, in fact, for the arguments mentioned above, each argument raises different questions about the support that the premises provide to the conclusion. Moreover, for each distinct premise set and conclusion, there are distinct questions that arise about the acceptability of at least some of the premises that figure in a given premise set. If we identify arguments with premise sets and conclusions, then, even in principle, for arguments that have the same conclusion, there are distinct considerations that arise about the acceptability of the premises of those arguments.

Kant says:

> There are only three kinds of proof for the existence of God possible from speculative reason. All paths of which one may set forth with this aim either begin from determinate experience and the special constitution of our world of sense known through it, and ascend from that by means of laws of causality to the highest cause outside the world; or else they are empirically grounded on an experience that is only indeterminate, i.e. on some existence; or, finally, they abstract from all experience and infer the existence of a highest cause entirely a priori from mere concepts. The first proof is the physico-theological, the second the cosmological, and the third the ontological proof. There are no more of them, and there also cannot be any more. (*CPR* A 590/B 618)

According to Kant, the 'path' of 'the cosmological proof' begins with—is 'empirically grounded on'—'an experience that is only indeterminate'. What does this mean? When we look at familiar cosmological arguments, they do not contain premises that are concerned with 'indeterminate experiences'. Indeed, when we look at fa-

---

3 For ontological arguments, see Anselm (1078 in Charlesworth 1965, 58), Descartes (1641 in 1991, vol. 2, 44–9) Gödel (c. 1941 in 2003, 403–4, 429–37), Plantinga (1974, 196–221) and Oppy (1996 and 2018). For cosmological arguments, see Aquinas (1272 in 1964, vol. 2, 5–18), Leibniz (1704 in 1981, 499–510), Craig (1979), Koons (1997), Gale and Pruss (1999), O'Connor (2008), Pruss and Rasmussen (2018) and Oppy (2006, 97–173).

miliar cosmological arguments, there is typically no mention of experience in any of their premises.

In his discussion of 'the cosmological argument', Kant says:

> The minor premise ['I exist'] contains an experience; the major premise ['Necessarily, if something exists, then a necessary being exists'] an inference from an experience in general to the existence of something necessary. (*CPR* A 605/B 633)

What does it mean to say that the premise 'I exist' 'contains an experience'? On its face, this just looks like some kind of category error. I assume that what Kant has in mind is that any justification that anyone might have for asserting the words 'I exist' is *a posteriori:* it is only on the basis of having had some experiences that one can be justified in asserting that one exists.

Kant's threefold classification of arguments from speculative reason for the existence of God is thus something like this: (a) there is 'the ontological argument', all of whose premises are justified *a priori*, i. e. independently of any experience; (b) there is 'the cosmological argument', some of whose premises are justified *a posteriori*, but only on the basis of the having of experience (and not on the details of the content of experience); and (c) there is 'the teleological argument', some of whose premises are justified *a posteriori* on the basis of the details of the content of particular experiences.

Kant's project in *CPR* A 592–631/B 620–59 is to show that it is impossible to prove the existence of God by any of these arguments from speculative reason. In particular, in *CPR* A 603–21/B 631–49, Kant aims to show that it is impossible to prove the existence of God by way of an argument some of whose premises are justified *a posteriori* but only on the basis of having experience (and not on the details of the content of that experience).

Kant's characterisation of 'the cosmological argument' draws on broader features of his critical philosophy. Familiar contemporary typologies of arguments from speculative reason for the existence of God distinguish between arguments that appeal to fundamental structural features of reality—causation, dependence, law, modality, spacetime, and so on—and arguments that appeal to complex individual elements in reality—biological organisms, biological evolution, biochemical homeostasis, and so forth. However, for Kant, premises that advert to structural features of causation, dependence, law, modality and spacetime are claims that, insofar as they are justified, are justified on the basis of the having of experience, independently of the content of that experience.

It seems to me that there is something deeply unsatisfying—problematic—about the initial strategy that Kant employs in his discussion of 'the cosmological argument'. His aim is to show that no cosmological proof succeeds. Moreover, his

broader aim is to show that no proof from speculative reason succeeds. However, his initial discussion of 'the cosmological argument' is focused on a particular formulation of a cosmological argument, and the major faults to which he draws attention are faults in that particular formulation of a cosmological argument. Even if Kant's initial criticism of 'the cosmological argument'—the particular formulation that he considers—were utterly decisive, there is still an enormous gap between achievement and ambition. How can we be sure that there is not some other cosmological argument that does not suffer from the vices of 'the cosmological argument'?

True enough, Kant has independent reasons for thinking that there cannot be a successful cosmological argument. Indeed, he cites some of these reasons when he turns to consider the "nest of dialectical presumptions" that "transcendental criticism can easily discover and destroy" (*CPR* A 609/B 637). Consider, for example:

> The transcendental principle of inferring from the contingent to a cause [...] has significance only in the world of sense [...]. The principle of causality has no significance at all and no mark of its use except in the world of sense. (*CPR* A 609/B 637)

While subsequent generations of philosophers—e.g. among the positivists and the logical positivists—were prepared to take an even harder line, it is clear that, if you buy enough of the contestable features of Kant's worldview, then you will suppose that there can be no proof from speculative reason of the existence of God. But, in the initial part of *CPR* A 603/B 631, Kant is not just saying: there can be no proof from speculative reason of the existence of God because [...] critical philosophy! The claim that all arguments from speculative reason for the existence of God depend upon the mistaken view that existence is a real predicate is plainly intended to be a contribution to philosophical theology that stands independently of the main contours of Kant's critical philosophy.

3 Third Pass

Even if the initial part of *CPR* A 603/B 631 is meant to be a contribution to philosophical theology that stands independently of the main contours of Kant's critical philosophy, there may be details of this part of the discussion of 'the cosmological argument' that depend upon Kant's critical philosophy.

Consider, for example, Lemma 2. In my earlier discussion, I presented this as follows:
1. A necessary being exists. (Premise)
2. (Therefore) God exists. (From 1)

But, in the text, we are actually given a much more complex piece of reasoning:

> The necessary being can be determined only in one single way, i.e., in regard to all possible predicates, it can be determined by only one of them, so consequently it must be thoroughly determined through its concept. Now only one single concept of a thing is possible that thoroughly determines the thing *a priori*, namely that of an *ens realissimum:* Thus the concept of the most real being is the only single one through which a necessary being can be thought, i.e., there necessarily exists a highest being. (*CPR* A 605/B 633)

This text has some characteristically maddening features. For example, the terms '*ens realissimum*', 'highest being' and 'most real being' are used interchangeably; if this were not so, the argument of the passage would be evidently invalid. In this passage, the words 'necessary being' are nowhere preceded by the word 'absolutely'; however, in the preceding passage, the words 'absolutely necessary being' were used throughout. In this passage, the words 'a priori' appear exactly once (in the expression 'thoroughly determined a priori'); if the words 'a priori' add anything in this single use, then the argument of the passage is plainly invalid. In this passage, the word 'necessarily' occurs in the conclusion of the argument, even though it does not occur in the conclusion of the preceding argument; again, if the word 'necessarily' has some significance in the conclusion, then it seems that the argument of the passage is plainly invalid. In this passage, we begin with 'the necessary being' even though the conclusion of the preceding passage was merely that 'a necessary being exists' (Perhaps we might think to fix this by supposing that we arbitrarily select a necessary being to be the focus of the second part of the argument: 'the necessary being' is just 'the necessary being that we have arbitrarily selected for attention'. But that seems inconsistent with the claim that the necessary being is thoroughly determined through its concept.)

A rough approximation to the argument of the passage is something like this:
1. The necessary being exists. (Premise, conclusion of preceding argument)
2. The necessary being is thoroughly determined through its concept. (Lemma 3)
3. The only thing that is thoroughly determined through its concept is the highest being. (Premise)
4. (Therefore) The highest being exists. (From 1, 2, and 3)

Lemma 3
1. The necessary being can be determined by only one among all possible predicates. (Premise)
2. (Therefore) The necessary being is thoroughly determined through its concept.

While this approximation seems to get to the desired conclusion from the given premises, it is not clear that it fully captures the Kantian formulation. The obvious

way to think about the argument that I have given is that we get to the conclusion that the highest being exists from the premise that the necessary being exists by establishing that the necessary being is the highest being. But the final sentence of the quoted passage might be taken to suggest a different structure for the argument:

1. The necessary being exists. (Premise, conclusion of preceding argument)
2. The concept of the highest being is the only one through which a necessary being can be thought. (Lemma 4)
3. (Therefore) Necessarily, there is a highest being. (From 1, 2)

Lemma 4
1. The necessary being is thoroughly determined through its concept. (Premise)
2. The only thing that is thoroughly determined through its concept is the highest being. (Premise)
3. (Therefore) The concept of the highest being is the only one through which a necessary being can be thought. (From 1, 2)

This formulation of the argument seems quite unsatisfactory. In particular, it is surely obvious that a necessary being can be thought through the concept of a necessary being. The concept of a necessary being is hardly in worse standing than the concept of a highest being; if there were some objection to talk of the concept of a necessary being, there would surely be equally compelling objection to talk of a highest being. But, if a necessary being can be thought through the concept of a necessary being, then it is simply false that the concept of the highest being is the only one through which a necessary being can be thought. Perhaps it is worth recalling that the conclusion of the first part of the argument is that a necessary being exists. We cannot even formulate that conclusion unless the concept of a necessary being is in good standing.

Perhaps it is also worth noting that, on this alternative formulation, there might be some temptation to think that the first premise is redundant. It is consistent with the written text that Kant thinks that 'the cosmological argument' requires that the claim that *necessarily, there is a highest being* is entailed by the claim that *the concept of the highest being is the only one through which a necessary being can be thought.* But we have already seen that we can reach the desired conclusion, using the premises that Kant introduces, without taking that argumentative route.

However Kant thinks that the second part of 'the cosmological argument' is supposed to run, there are important questions to ask about the acceptability of its premises. In particular, we need to know what it is for a thing to be 'thoroughly

determined' by its concept. And, in order to understand this, we need to know what, for a given thing, makes a particular concept *its* concept.

If we are to suppose that, for a given thing, there is a particular concept that is *its* concept, then it seems natural to suppose that a concept of a given thing must give a complete representation of the properties of that thing: for each property that the thing has, the concept includes that property; and for each property that the thing lacks, the concept does not include that property. But this cannot be right: for, on this way of thinking about concepts, each thing would be thoroughly determined by its concept (and so Premise 3 in our representation of the argument would be false).

However, if we suppose that a concept of a given thing need not give a complete representation of the properties of that thing, then it becomes quite unclear why there cannot be many different concepts of any given thing. If 'the morning star' and 'the evening star' are distinct concepts of the same thing—the planet Venus—then we have a model for cases in which there are different concepts of the same thing. It is very hard to see why it could not be the case that there is a concept other than 'the highest being' that is nonetheless a concept of the highest being; and it is very hard to see why it could not be the case that there is a concept other than 'the necessary being' that is nonetheless a concept of the necessary being. Again, this looks like it cannot be right: for, on this way of thinking about concepts, it is not true that, for 'the highest being' that there is a concept that is *its* concept; and it is not true for 'the necessary being' that there is a concept that is *its* concept. But that means that neither Premise 2 nor Premise 3 is properly formed: in each of these premises, the expression 'its concept' fails to have a unique referent.

Of course, it is important not to lose sight of the overall dialectic. Kant does not intend to praise 'the cosmological argument' that he formulates. However, it is questionable what value is to be found in savaging an argument that you have been careless in constructing. In the initial discussion in *CPR* A 603/B 631, Kant allows—if only for the sake of argument—that the first part of 'the cosmological argument' does establish that there is at least one necessary being. But, if that is so, then the only remaining task is one of identification: if we can show that, among the necessary beings that there are, at least one of them is a highest being—and if we can establish relevant proofs of uniqueness—then we shall have established that the highest being exists. We do not need a new proof of existence to get from what Kant is prepared to concede—if only for the sake of argument—to the conclusion at which the cosmological arguer aims. There are many different

paths that lead to the conclusion that it cannot be that 'the cosmological argument' 'assumes' 'the ontological argument'.[4]

4 Natural Necessity

Is it true that the first part of 'the cosmological argument' does establish that there is at least one necessary being? Does Kant provide us with good grounds for rejecting the soundness of the first part of 'the cosmological argument'?

Kant complains about the inference from the impossibility of an infinite series of causes one upon another to a first cause, which the principles of the use of reason itself cannot justify our inferring within experience, still less our extending this principle to somewhere beyond it; and about the false self-satisfaction reason finds in regard to the completion of [the series of causes] by the fact that one finally does away with every condition and one's assuming this to be the completion of one's concept; and about the confusion of the logical possibility of a concept with its transcendental possibility which once again can only apply to the field of possible experiences. (*CPR* A 610/B 638)

These complaints are, I think, intended to strike against the major premise of the first part of the cosmological argument, i.e. against the claim that, necessarily, if something exists, then a necessary being exists. But it is not clear that they land a serious blow.

Consider the following argument:

1. Some things cause other things. (Premise)
2. Whenever one thing causes a second thing, and that second thing a third, then the first thing causes the third. (Premise)
3. Nothing causes itself. (Premise)
4. There is no infinite regress of causes. (Premise)
5. (Therefore) There are first causes, i.e. things that cause other things but that themselves have no causes. (From 1, 2, 3, and 4)

This argument is valid. Moreover, the premises other than Premise 4 all look very solid. But, if that's right, then this argument justifies the inference from the impossibility of an infinite series of causes to a first cause. I think that Kant accepts the first three premises 'within experience'; but, if that is so, then—contrary to what

---

4 For competing discussions of this matter, see, for example, Vallicella (2000), Smith (2003), and Forgie (2003).

Kant claims—the inference from denial of infinite regress to first cause *is* justified 'within experience'.

Suppose that we grant that there is no infinite regress of causes 'within experience', i.e. within the world described by science. By the above argument, we can infer that our world has a causal origin: it begins with something that has no cause. Call this causal origin 'the initial singularity'. It is plausible to suppose that the initial singularity is necessary: every possible world begins with the same initial singularity, and diverges from the actual world only as the result of the outplaying of objective chance. On this view, whatever exists in the initial singularity exists of necessity: but everything in this view falls 'within experience', i.e. within the world that is described by science.

There may be other ways of arguing for the conclusion that the existence of a necessary first cause does not require any assumptions that are not justified 'within experience'. However, it is enough that we have one model: there is nothing in the complaints that Kant puts forward that touch the view that the initial singularity is necessary (or that whatever exists in the initial singularity is necessary).

Perhaps it might be objected that the initial singularity—or any thing that exists in the initial singularity—is not the kind of thing that can be absolutely necessary. But I take it that whatever is necessary is such that it obtains no matter what: there is nothing on which that which is necessary depends. So there is no distinction between necessity and absolute necessity. If you insist: the initial singularity *is* absolutely necessary; but Gricean strictures tell you to say only that the initial singularity is necessary.

Perhaps it might then be said that the initial singularity—or any thing that exists in the initial singularity—is not the kind of thing that can be necessary. But attempts to justify this contention are underwhelming. Inductive arguments—from the (presumed) contingency of the current state of the natural world and its contents—overlook the evidently special status of the initial state of the natural world and its contents. No one can accept an inductive argument—from the ubiquity of natural causes for the current state of the natural world and its contents—to the conclusion that there is a natural cause of the initial state of the natural world and its contents. What reason is there to suppose that an inductive argument for the contingency of the initial state of the natural world and its contents is any more compelling?

Perhaps it will be insisted—quite correctly—that the conception of necessity that is in play here cannot be the conception of necessity that Kant employs. Kant says:

> [T]he condition that one demands for absolute necessity can be encountered only in a single being which therefore must contain everything in its concept that is required for absolute ne-

> cessity and thus makes possible an inference *a priori* to that [...]. [I]f one proposes to cognise something as absolutely necessary, then that cognition must also carry absolute necessity with it [...]. [R]eason recognises as absolutely necessary only what is necessary from its concept. (*CPR* A 611/B 639)

It is not in the least bit plausible to suppose that it is a conceptual truth that the initial singularity is necessary: mere *a priori* reflection alone could not possibly justify us in supposing that the initial singularity is necessary. But it is the thought that *a posteriori* theorising might justify the claim that the initial singularity is necessary that allows us to insist that we might come to the view that the initial singularity is necessary 'within experience'.

By the lights of Kant's critical philosophy, there are no objective grounds to justify acceptance of the claim that, necessarily, if something exists, then a necessary being exists. But Kant's critical philosophy is not compulsory. Not everyone shares the Kantian ambition to place strict requirements on speculative reason in order to make room for faith in God, trust in freedom and hope for immortality. When, at the very end of the passage "On the Impossibility of a Cosmological Proof of God's Existence" (*CPR* A 603–14/B 631–42), Kant says that "reason consists just in the fact that we can give an account of all of our concepts, opinions and assertions" (*CPR* A 614/B 642) it seems to me to be apt to reply that, in part, reason consists in recognising that we have no account to give of some of our concepts, opinions and assertions. Every philosophical inquiry terminates with the turning of a spade; but it is never the case that it would be impossible to go on digging. In particular, it is bound to be the case, in any worldview, that some claims are accepted either as brute contingencies or as brute necessities. What really matters, from the standpoint of reason, is whether a given worldview can reasonably be considered superior to accessible alternatives. It is no easy task to show that worldviews that hold that, *necessarily, if something exists, a necessary being exists*, cannot satisfy this requirement.

5 Empty Names and Non-Existent Objects

There are still many difficulties in Kant's discussion of 'the cosmological argument' that I have not yet examined. Consider, again, the following passage (much of which was cited earlier):

> [R]eason believes that it meets with [the requisite conditions for an absolute necessity] solely and uniquely in the concept of a most real being and so it infers: that is the absolutely necessary being. But it is clear that here one presupposes that the concept of a being of the highest reality completely suffices for the concept of an absolute necessity of existence [...]. Abso-

> lute necessity is an existence from mere concepts. If I say: the concept of an *ens realissimum* is a concept, and indeed the one single concept, that fits necessary existence and is adequate to it, then I must admit that the latter could be concluded from it. (*CPR* A 607/B 635)

Suppose we grant—at least for the sake of argument—that there are such things as the concept of a most real being and the concept of an absolutely necessary being. How should we think about these concepts? In particular, what should we say about the content of these concepts?

A natural thought is this: the content of the concept C is given by a set of sentences of the form *necessarily, for any x, if x is C then x is F.* So, for example, the content of the concept of a most real being might include the following sentences:

> Necessarily, for any x, if x is a most real being, then x is omnipotent.
> Necessarily, for any x, if x is a most real being, then x is omniscient.
> Necessarily, for any x, if x is a most real being, then x is perfectly good.

And the content of the concept of an absolutely necessary being might include the following sentences:

> Necessarily, for any x, if x is an absolutely necessary being, then x does not depend for its existence on anything else.
> Necessarily, for any x, if x is an absolutely necessary being, then x does not depend for its nature on anything else.

Suppose—following Kant—that we accept that the required conditions for an absolutely necessary being are met solely and uniquely by a most real being. That is, suppose that we accept that, necessarily, for any x, x is an absolutely necessary being iff x is a most real being.

This does not yield any justification for supposing that there is an absolutely necessary being (or that there is a most real being). Nor does it yield any justification for saying—as Kant does—that *that* [the most real being] is the absolutely necessary being. Moreover, this is true even if we suppose that the concept of a most real being includes:

> Necessarily, for any x, x is a most real being only if x exists of absolute necessity.

All that these concepts supply us with are strict generalisations.

Suppose, nonetheless, that we choose to introduce a name for a most real being—say: 'God'. Since it is plausible that there cannot be more than one most

real being, we might even say that this name applies to *the* most real being. What can we now say truly using the name 'God'?

Perhaps you might think that we can say the following things:

God is omnipotent.
God is omniscient.
God is perfectly good.

And perhaps you might add that these claims are conceptual truths: it just follows, from the (individual) concept of God, that God—the most real being—is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and so on.

However, if we say all of this, then clearly there is a problem looming. Restricting our attention to the present case, we may be happy to conclude that God also exists of absolute necessity. But there are all kinds of other concepts that we can form that include a condition of the form:

Necessarily, if x is a C, then x exists of absolute necessity.

Since, for example, it is not true that there exist creatures that have more or less all of the characterising properties of unicorns except that they also exist of absolute necessity, there must be a misstep in the line of thought that has led us to this point.

We might deny that what it takes for a concept to 'fit' and 'be adequate to' certain conditions is not a matter of the inclusion of those conditions in the characterising content of the concept. Whether there is a most real being that exists of absolute necessity is not a question that is resolved by looking to the content of the concept of a most real being; rather, it is a question that is resolved, if it can be resolved, by looking to see whether there is a most real being (and whether it exists of absolute necessity). If we take this option, then we might pair it with the further view that we cannot introduce a name 'N' in connection with a description 'the C' unless we have first satisfied ourselves that there is something that satisfies the description 'the C'. And, pushing a little further, we might also deny that there are any such things as non-existent objects. If we take this line, we can accept the account of concepts, and we can allow that existence and necessary can figure in the strict generalisations that characterise the content of concepts.

Alternatively, we might accept that there are non-existent objects, that we can just introduce a name 'N' in connection with a description 'the C', and we can take it that what it is for a concept to 'fit' and 'be adequate to' certain conditions is just a matter of the inclusion of those conditions in the characterising content of the concept. However, if we do all this, then we need to restrict the characterising condi-

tionals in the way that contemporary Meinongians do. In particular, we must bar conditionals of the form:

> Necessarily, for any x, if x is C, then x exists.
> Necessarily, for any x, if x is C, then x necessarily exists.
> Necessarily, for any x, if x is C, then x absolutely necessarily exists.

on pain of generating falsehoods (such as the claim that there exist creatures that have more or less all of the characterising properties of unicorns except that they also exist of absolute necessity).

The upshot here is not that existence is not a predicate, nor even that existence is not a predicate that can figure in the strict generalisations that characterise the content of concepts. There are theoretical options that do not hew this line. But, whichever theoretical option we take, we cannot follow Kant when he says:

> Absolute necessity is an existence from mere concepts. If I say: the concept of an *ens realissimum* is a concept, and indeed the one single concept, that fits necessary existence and is adequate to it, then I must admit that the latter could be concluded from it. (*CPR* A 607/B 635)

If we are to 'draw conclusions from a concept', then we must be making use of the strict generalisations that characterise the content of that concept. But, if we suppose that the strict generalisations that characterise the content of concepts have 'consequents' that attribute existence, necessary existence, absolutely necessary existence, and the like, then, *in those cases*, we certainly cannot be 'drawing conclusions from the concept' about existence, necessary existence, and absolutely necessary existence: for, permitting ourselves to act in that way would open the floodgates to belief in the existence, necessary existence, and absolutely necessary existence of a multitude of things that simply do not exist.

Perhaps some might resist the line of argument that I have been developing by insisting that there are privileged concepts to which the more general stricture does not apply. For example, some might wish to distinguish between 'natural' and 'artificial' concepts, and to insist that, while 'absolutely necessary being' and 'most real being' are natural concepts, 'creature that has more or less all of the characterising properties of unicorns except that it also exists of absolute necessity' is an artificial concept. This objection seems entirely uncompelling to me. I do not see anything 'natural' about the concepts 'absolutely necessary being' and 'most real being'; on any plausible way of measuring naturalness, I see no significant difference between these concepts and 'creature that has more or less all of the characterising properties of unicorns except that it also exists of absolute necessity'.

6 Unsatisfied Predicates and Uninstantiated Properties

Questions about empty names and non-existent objects might also turn our attention to questions about unsatisfied predicates and uninstantiated properties. Very early in the preceding discussion, I criticised Kant for making use of what might be supposed to be traditional claims about the 'convertibility' of universally and existentially quantified claims. Is it unfair to criticise Kant for making use of what were once widely accepted principles of logic?

I do not think so. It is true that we can adapt our logic to accommodate the view that there are no unsatisfied predicates, just as it is true that we can adapt our logic to accommodate the view that there are no empty names. If we wish to make use of classical predicate calculus, we need to make sure that we are not trying to apply it to inferences that can only be adequately handled in free logic. If we are arguing about existence in a context in which potentially empty names are in use, then we simply cannot invoke classical predicate calculus: for any individual constant a, it is a theorem of the classical predicate calculus that there exists something that is identical to a (which is just a longwinded way of saying that a exists). So, if we ignore the cautionary advice, we might take ourselves to have a logical proof that God, Santa Claus, and anything else you please exists.

If we wish to make use of Aristotelian predicate logic, we need to make sure that we are not trying to apply it to inferences in a context in which potentially empty predicates are in use. This is not just an argument with the benefit of hindsight; it should have been apparent to anyone who uses Aristotelian logic that this restriction must be observed. Consider the following pair of claims:
1.   Every unicorn has a single horn on its head.
2.   There are no unicorns.

Anyone who accepts that (2) is true accepts that there are empty predicates; and denying that there are unicorns is surely the common sense position. But anyone who accepts that (1) is true—perhaps simply as a matter of definition—and who accepts the first convertibility principle upon which Kant relies is obliged to reject (2): if every unicorn has a single horn on its head, then, by the relevant convertibility principle, it follows that there exists at least one unicorn that has a single horn on its head.

When Kant claims that *every absolutely necessary being is a most real being* entails *some most real beings are absolutely necessary beings*, he ought to have noted that this is only so if 'absolutely necessary being' and 'most real being' are non-empty predicates. In a context in which we are arguing about whether

there are absolutely necessary beings and most real beings, it is obvious—and it should have been obvious to Kant—that the condition for the legitimate application of the convertibility principle cannot be taken to be satisfied without supposing the truth of the claim that we are aiming to establish by this very use of the convertibility principle.

7 Concluding Summary

In this chapter, I have argued for two main claims. First, I have argued that it is not true that cosmological arguments depend upon ontological arguments, and that Kant is simply mistaken when he argues that 'the cosmological argument' 'assumes' 'the ontological argument'. There are several ways in which Kant's argument for this conclusion goes wrong. His detailed arguments rely upon logical principles that he ought to have been able to see cannot be applied in the context of those arguments; moreover, there is no plausible way of reaching his desired conclusion by another route that does not go through the logical principles upon which he relies. Quite apart from this technical problem, there is a strategic difficulty: Kant grants, for the sake of argument, that one can establish that there is an absolutely necessary being, and then tries to argue that you need 'the ontological argument' in order to get from there to the conclusion that there is a most real being. But, given that you have already established the *existence* of an absolutely necessary being, all that remains to be done is to show that that being is a most real being; and that *identificatory* task cannot require, as a lemma, an argument whose conclusion is that a most real being exists. None of this is to deny that there is a genuine gap in cosmological arguments for the existence of God that needs to be filled: it is one thing to show that there is, say, a first cause, and quite another thing to show that the first cause is God. However, there is nothing in Kant's arguments that shows that there is no possible way of bridging this gap.

Second, I have argued that Kant does not provide a compelling critique of cosmological arguments to the conclusion that there is an absolutely necessary being. I maintain that it *is* true that, if you accept enough of Kant's critical philosophy, then you will suppose that there is no successful argument from speculative reason for the existence of God. Indeed, if you accept enough of Kant's critical philosophy, you will suppose that speculative reason cannot furnish us with adequate grounds to believe—let alone to know—that God exists. But Kant's critical philosophy is not compulsory. And the claim that there is an absolutely necessary being can be perfectly well embraced by naturalists: there is no more difficulty involved in supposing that the initial singularity is absolutely necessary than there is in supposing that the initial singularity was created by an absolutely necessary God. While it

is not common for naturalists to accept cosmological arguments for the existence of an absolutely necessary being, it seems to me that there is no need for naturalists to make a strenuous search for objections to such arguments. Moreover, since it is unlikely that any naturalists accept Kant's critical philosophy, it is unlikely that any naturalists should be persuaded by *Kant's* criticisms of cosmological arguments to reject the claim that there is an absolutely necessary being.

References

Allison, Henry, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

Anselm of Canterbury, *St. Anselms Proslogion (1078)*, ed. by Max Charlesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Aquinas, Thomas (1485), *Summa Theologiae*, 61 volumes (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), vol. 2.

Bennett, Jonathan F., *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

Chignell, Andrew/ Pereboom, Derk, "Natural Theology and Natural Religion," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/natural-theology/ (2015), last access October 6, 2016.

Craig, William, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

Descartes, René (1641), "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol. 2, 1–62.

Forgie, William, "The Alleged Dependency of the Cosmological Argument on the Ontological Argument," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003), 364–70.

Gale, Richard/ Pruss, Alexander, "A New Cosmological Argument," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999), 461–76.

Gödel, Kurt (c. 1941), "Unpublished Essays and Lectures," in *Collected Works*, ed. by Solomon Feferman, John W. Dawson Jr., Stephen C. Kleene, Gregory H. Moore, Robert M. Solovay, and Jean van Heijenoort, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vol. 3.

Koons, Robert, "A New Look at the Cosmological Argument," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997), 193–211.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1704), *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

O'Connor, Timothy, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008).

Oppy, Graham, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Oppy, Graham, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Oppy, Graham, ed., *Ontological Arguments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Pasternack, Lawrence, "The *Ens Realissimum* and Necessary Being in the *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001), 467–74.

Pasternack, Lawrence/ Rossi, Philip, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-religion/ (2014), last access October 6, 2016.

Plantinga, Alvin, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

Proops, Ian, "Kant on the Cosmological Argument," *Philosophers Imprint* 14 (2014), 1–21.

Pruss, Alexander/ Rasmussen, Joshua, *Necessary Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Rohlf, Michael, "Immanuel Kant," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall 2020 ed.), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/kant/, last access November 1, 2020.

Smith, Donald, "Kant on the Dependency of the Cosmological Argument on the Ontological Argument," *European Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2003), 206–18.

Vallicella, William, "Does the Cosmological Argument Depend on the Ontological?," *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000), 441–58.

van Cleve, James, *Problems from Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

Uygar Abaci
Kant on the Ontological Proof

Kant is probably the originator of the term "ontological proof (or argument)".[1] Although the English language Kant literature tends to restrict Kant's conception of the ontological proof to its traditional form that was first introduced by St. Anselm in the *Proslogion* and popularized by Descartes in the *Meditations*, Kant's initial reference to "*ontologische Beweis*" suggests a broader type of argumentation of which the Anselmian-Cartesian proof is a species. In his *Ground of Proof* essay (1763) Kant classifies all proofs of God's existence into two kinds with regard to their source of derivation. The first derives God's existence from "the concepts of the understanding of the merely *possible*", the second "from the empirical concept of the *existent*" (*GP* 2:155.24–156.1). He further divides both of the two kinds into two species with respect to their particular logical mechanics. The second kind may be either a two-step proof, proceeding from what we experience to exist to, first, an independent cause, and, then, to the divine features of that cause (i.e., the cosmological proof), or a proof that moves directly from the experienced existence to the existence and features of God at once (i.e., the teleological proof). The first kind, on the other hand, "may proceed either from the possible as a *ground* to the existence of God as a *consequence*, or from the possible as a *consequence* to the divine existence as a *ground*" (*GP* 2:156.2–3). Kant identifies the former as "the so-called Cartesian proof" (*GP* 2:156.22), and the latter as "the ontological proof" (*GP* 2:160.6). Thus, the proof that he refers to as "ontological" is in fact his own ground of proof (*Beweisgrund*), which he offers earlier in the essay and deems, by elimination, the only one among four species of proof with a possibility of success (*GP* 2:162.9–163.6). However, given that in other places he identifies the ontological proof as the "Cartesian"[2] and yet some other places as the "Anselmian"[3] proof, it is only reasonable to think that Kant construes the ontological proof as the first kind of proof above, moving, entirely *a priori*, from mere possibility (whether it is the mere possibility of God or of things in general) to actuality (i.e., the actual existence of God), thereby including both the traditional (Ansel-

mian-Cartesian) as well as his own proof.[4] Such broader conception of the ontological proof would also be compatible with Kant's definition of "ontotheology" as considering God "merely in terms of concepts" and "as the principle of all possibility" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1003.10–11), which, he clearly thinks, characterizes Anselm's (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1003.17) and Descartes' (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2.1005.35) ontological proofs as well as his own proof (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1034.8–10). While Kant does not explain why he calls this kind of proof "ontological" anywhere, such movement from the merely possible to the actual reflects the predominant conception of "*ontologia*" (or *metaphysica generalis*) among Kant's Wolffian audience, as an existentially neutral or essentialist study of being in general, where being a thing ("*ens*" or "*ding*") is sufficiently defined as possible and considered first in its mere possibility or essence, prior to the question of its existence.[5]

Thus, in the following, I will discuss how Kant's approach to the ontological proof evolves over his career by examining his treatment of both of the two species of the proof. This will yield two very different stories. On the one hand, Kant's understanding of the traditional ontological proof remains rather stable and his critique of it preserves its punchline despite displaying some development across his pre-critical and critical period writings. On the other hand, both his construction of his own proof itself and his evaluation of its validity significantly change in his critical period. I will argue that this difference between the trajectories of Kant's attitudes toward the two versions of the ontological proof is due to the fact that while the critical Kant retains the essence of his pre-critical conception of existence, which constitutes the ground of his critique of the traditional proof, his conception of modality in general undergoes a radical shift, which urges him to transform his own proof.

---

4 It is to be noted that Kant's conception of the ontological proof would also apply to what is usually called in the literature the "modal" version, offered , for instance, by Anselm in *Proslogion* III and Leibniz in the *Monadology* §§38–45, which still moves from the mere *possibility* of God to the *existence* of God, based on the reasoning that God cannot be contingently actual or contingently non-actual and must be either necessarily actual or impossible, and thus, if at all possible, then necessarily actual. Kant's explicit reference to Leibniz's modal proof in his refutation of the traditional version of the proof in the *CPR* (A 602/B 630) confirms that Kant himself thinks so.

5 See Wolff's *Logica* (1740 in 1983, §29). See also *Ontologia* (1736 in 1977, §§134–5).

1 The Traditional Proof

Kant seems to have never endorsed the traditional ontological proof. All of his discussions of the proof, pre-critical or critical, offer various objections to it, following a brief and rather consistent reconstruction, which tells us what exactly Kant takes to be the proof. In the *New Elucidation* (1755) he formulates the proof in the following way:

> [T]he claim is made that the existence of God is determined by that concept [...]. Form for yourself the concept of some being or other in which there is a totality of reality. It must be conceded that, given this concept, existence also has to be attributed to this being. And accordingly, the argument proceeds as follows: if all realities, without distinction of degree, are united in a certain being, then that being exists. (*NE* 1:394.31–5)

In the *Ground of Proof* essay, he attributes this reasoning to "the so-called Cartesian proof", except, this time, the concept of God is constructed as that of an *ens perfectissimum*:

> In it one begins by thinking the concept of a possible thing, in which one imagines that all true perfection is united. It is now assumed that existence is also a perfection of things. The existence of a Most Perfect Being is thus inferred from the possibility of a such a Being. (*GP* 2:156.22–6)

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/7), he offers the same reconstruction, switching back to the concept of God as *ens realissimum*:

> [The concept of a most real being] has, you say, all reality, and you are justified in assuming such a being as possible [...]. Now existence is also comprehended under all reality: thus existence lies in the concept of something possible. (*CPR* A 596/B 624)

Again, Kant's lectures on rational theology in 1780s report him as reiterating that the "Cartesian" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1005.35) or the "Anselmian or Cartesian" (*Danzig Rat. Theol. Baumbach* 28/2.2:1243.19) proof starts from the possibility of an *ens realissimum* and infers the (necessary) existence of such a being on the assumption that "existence is also a reality" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1005.36–7) or that existence "lies in its concept as a reality" (*Danzig Rat. Theol. Baumbach* 28/2.2:1245.13–14).

It is therefore clear that Kant retains his original reconstruction of the traditional version of the ontological proof throughout. He sees two logical steps in the proof: (1) Introduction of existence into the concept of God as a merely possible being having all realities (*ens realissimum*) or all perfections (*ens perfectissimum*),

and then (2) inferring the existence of this being from its mere concept or possibility. Since such existence logically entailed by the mere concept of a thing would be a logically necessary existence, the proof also establishes an identification between the notion of God as an *ens realissimum* or *perfectissimum* and that as an *ens necessarium.*

While Kant's conception of the ontological proof itself remains rather stable, his critique of this proof shows some variance and development in his writings. Now, against this proof, two major lines of objections can be advanced, each targeting one of the two logical steps at work in the proof. The first line aims to block the second step, i. e., the inference of the actual existence of God, the real entity, from the mere concept or possibility of God that implicitly contains existence. According to this line of objection, the inference from the existence thought in the concept of something to the actual existence of that thing is fallacious, unless the latter is already presupposed. The second line of objection goes for the more radical strategy of blocking the first step of introducing existence, under whatever disguise (e. g., as a "greatness" increasing feature in the case of Anselm or as a "perfection" in the case of Descartes) into the concept of God, by an appeal to the thesis that existence is just not the kind of predicate that can be contained in the concept of anything. The first line of objection has been the historically more mainstream one, pursued by Gaunilo and Aquinas against Anselm, Caterus against Descartes, and Crusius against Wolff.[6] The second line is often (rightly) attributed to Kant (and also, rather mistakenly, to Gassendi).[7] Dieter Henrich claims that Hume originates a third line of objection, according to which the very concept of an absolutely necessary being is not comprehensible with clarity and existence can never be derived from this concept.[8] Since Kant provides its best-known formulaic expression, "existence is not a predicate or a determination of a thing" (*GP* 2:72.2–3), and consistently keeps it at the core of his critique of the proof, the literature has justifiably focused on this, second line of objection. In fact, however, Kant's negative stance on the proof is more complicated. While in his pre-critical writings Kant carries out a single-layered attack on the proof, based on either one (but not both) of the first two lines of objections, in the *CPR* he develops a multi-layered and dialectically sophisticated attack, involving all the aforementioned three lines and introducing yet another, critical line of objection.

---

6 See Gaunilo (1078 in 2007, 105–14), Aquinas (1485 in 1948, 11–12), Caterus (1641 in 1984, 71–2), Crusius, *Entwurf* (1766 in 1964, §235).
7 On why this objection should not be identified with Gassendi's objection, see Forgie (2007), and on why the latter should be construed under the first line of objection, see Abaci (2019, 82–6).
8 Henrich (1960, 75–6).

Kant's first ever critique of the argument in the *New Elucidation* raises only the first line of objection. He points out that even if existence is conceived as a reality and thus as part of the concept of the being in which all realities are united, the inference or transition from that the existence conceived in the concept of that merely possible being to the real existence of that being would still not be warranted. For this transition "happens ideally, not really [...] if all those realities are only conceived as united together, then the existence of that being is also an existence in ideas" (*NE* 1:394.30–2).[9] Here Kant seems to allow a dual conception of existence, which is most explicitly adopted in the Anselmian version of the argument, i.e., ideal or mental existence (*esse intellectu*) as opposed to real or actual existence (*esse reale*), and yet insists that the former cannot be derived from the latter *a priori.* The question here is whether and how this line of objection is compatible with the second line of objection that Kant will advance later in the *Ground of Proof* essay.[10] A reflection from the early 1760s strongly suggests that Kant takes the first line of objection to be indecisive on its own. For once existence is considered among the possible predicates of a thing, Kant argues, "then certainly no proof that would be more conclusive and at the same time more intelligible than the Cartesian one could be demanded for demonstrating the existence of God" (*Notes and Fragments* 17:240.6–7, R 3706). Kant, then, seems to think that the insight of the first line of objection, i.e., that the transition from ideal to real predication is impossible without the presupposition of the actual existence of the subject in question, loses its force, if existence is considered as a predicate that could be involved in ideal predication in the first place. Thus, the first line must be complemented by the second line of objection.

In the *Ground of Proof* essay, Kant does not appeal to the first line of objection at all. In fact, even though the essay is the most important pre-critical text to understand Kant's approach to ontotheology, it does not really provide an explicit refutation of the traditional ontological proof. Kant is rather focused on the more positive project of providing his own alternative to the traditional proof. Only in the context of the aforementioned classification does he simply state that this kind of proof, which "proceeds from the concept of the merely possible as a ground to existence as a consequence", is doomed to fail simply because "existence is not a predicate at all" (*GP* 2:156.33). While Kant does not offer much of a logical explanation here as to why this thesis about existence should amount to such a knock-

---

9 Sala (1990, 51–2), I think rightly, suggests that this formulation of the irreducible distinction between ideal and real (existential) predication is inspired by Crusius. See Crusius' *Entwurf* (1766 in 1964, §235).

10 Both Schönfeld (2000, 199) and Schmucker (1980, 65) argue, I think unconvincingly, that Kant's account in the *New Elucidation* already involves or implies that existence is not a real predicate.

down refutation, he obviously holds that only if existence is contained in the concept of a possible something as a predicate can the actual existence of that thing be derived as a consequence from its concept.

Now, Kant's critique of the traditional ontological proof in the *CPR* offers an explanation of how his thesis about existence refutes the proof. However, although the literature tends to reduce Kant's refutation in the *CPR* to the second line of objection based on this thesis and thereby to a more detailed reiteration of his position in the *Ground of Proof* essay, the former has a dialectically complicated structure and involves a number of subtle arguments that go well beyond a statement of the second line of objection. There are at least four objections that Kant levels against the proof.

Kant first raises the question of the unintelligibility of the very concept of an absolutely necessary being:

> By means of the word unconditional to reject all the conditions that the understanding always needs in order to regard something as necessary, is far from enough to make intelligible to myself whether through a concept of an unconditionally necessary being I am still thinking something or perhaps nothing at all. (*CPR* A 593/B 621)

This sounds very much like the third line of objection that Henrich formulates. However, Kant goes for a more intricate charge here: "the absolute necessity of the judgment is only a conditioned necessity of the thing or the predicate in the judgment" (*CPR* A 593–4/B 621–2). The logical necessity of propositions such as "A triangle has three sides" does not warrant the logical necessity of the existence of the subject, triangle, or of the predicate, three sides. The existential import of such logical necessity of the connection between the subject-concept and the predicate-concept is only conditional: "if a triangle exists, then three sides also exist". Yet, of course, the point of the ontological proof is precisely that there is a unique existential proposition, "God exists", whose logical necessity would warrant the logical necessity of the existence of its subject, God. Kant points out that this is only possible if the concept of existence is introduced into intension of the concept of God as a first-order predicate:

> Nevertheless the illusion of this logical necessity has proved so powerful that [...] one believed one could infer with certainty that because existence necessarily pertains to the object of this concept [...] its existence can also be posited necessarily. (*CPR* A 594/B 622)

So if existence is not the kind of predicate that could be contained in the concept of anything, then "God exists" cannot be an analytic or logically necessary proposition. In fact, if existence were indeed such a predicate, then the very concept of logically necessary existence would not be unintelligible. This means that Kant's

first salvo disputing the concept of an absolutely necessary being cannot be a standalone objection and its force relies on the thesis that existence is not a predicate. Without an additional argument for the truth of the thesis, the proponent of the argument would not be swayed by Kant's insistence that the logical necessity of propositions does not yield necessary existence.

Kant's second move is to offer an objection that does not depend on his thesis about existence. He concedes, for the sake of the argument, that existence can be contained in the concept of God as a predicate and thus "God exists" is an analytic and logically necessary proposition. His claim is that even then the logical necessity of God's existence would not follow. This is a variant of the first line of objection, blocking the inference from the conceived to the actual existence of God. There are two sub-arguments that Kant offers in support of this objection. First, he argues that even though the logical necessity of a proposition consists in that its negation yields a logical contradiction, for the connection between its subject-concept and predicate-concept holds as a matter of logical necessity, the negation or cancellation of the subject in the first place would not result in any logical contradiction:

> If I cancel the predicate in an identical judgment and keep the subject, then a contradiction arises; hence I say that the former necessarily pertains to the latter. If I cancel the subject together with the predicate, then no contradiction arises; for there is no longer anything that could be contradicted. (*CPR* A 594/B 622)

The cancellation of a subject, with all of its predicates, is never contradictory. For contradiction arises only when something is posited and cancelled at the same time, and when nothing is posited, there is nothing left to be contradicted. Absolute nothingness is thus a logically possible state of affairs. This entails that no particular thing exists with logical necessity, or, existence is always logically contingent. Absolute necessary existence or the kind of necessity that God, as *ens necessarium*, would enjoy should not be construed in terms of logical necessity. As we will see, Kant's own alternative proof employs a non-logical notion of absolute necessary existence in order to address precisely this flaw in the traditional proof.

This objection based on the logical contingency of existence in general applies to the version of the traditional ontological proof that we find in Anselm's *Proslogion* II and Descartes' *Meditation* V. However, the modal version of the proof, which we find, for instance, in Anselm's *Proslogion* III and Leibniz's *Monadology* §§38–45, runs the reasoning that contingent existence (or non-existence) is incompatible with the very idea of an absolutely necessary being. Either such a being is impossible or it exists necessarily. Otherwise put, if God is indeed possible, then He exists necessarily. One challenge for this version is to prove the antecedent of this condi-

tional. Leibniz appeals to the non-contradictoriness of the concept of the most real being as the proof of the possibility of this being. While Kant notes that this only proves the logical possibility of the concept in question and "falls short of proving the possibility of its object" (*CPR* A 596/B 624), i.e., the real possibility of God, he does not make this modal point the center of his objection and concedes, for the sake of the argument, that God or *ens realissimum* is really possible. Instead, Kant argues that the proponent of the proof commits a contradiction by upholding the conditional "if God is possible, then He exists necessarily": "You have already committed a contradiction when you have brought the concept of existence, under whatever disguised name, into the concept of a thing which you would think merely in terms of its possibility" (*CPR* A 597/B 625). This is a puzzling charge because introducing existence into the concept of something where one seeks to prove the possibility (and existence) of that thing might surely be question-begging, but not a contradiction *per se*.[11] However, the contradiction charge would make better sense as part of a larger charge that Kant presses:

> If one allows you to [introduce existence into the concept of God], then you have won the illusion of a victory, but in fact you have said nothing; for you have committed a mere tautology. I ask you: is the proposition, This or that thing [...] exists—is this proposition, I say, an analytic or a synthetic proposition? If it is the former, then with existence you add nothing to your thought of the thing; but then either the thought that is in you must be the thing itself, or else you have presupposed an existence belonging to possibility, and then inferred that existence on this pretext from its inner possibility, which is nothing but a miserable tautology. (*CPR* A 597/B 625)

I propose the following reconstruction of Kant's argument here:
1. "God exists" is either analytical or synthetic.
2. If "God exists" is analytical, then the predicate-concept "exists" adds nothing to the subject-concept "God".
3. If existence does not add to the concept 'God,' then either
   a) the concept "God" in your mind is God himself, which is absurd, or
   b) the predicate-concept "exists" repeats what is already contained in the subject-concept "God" and thus "God exists" is a mere tautology.
4. If "God exists" is synthetic, it can be negated without contradiction.

---

11 Proops (2015, 14) argues that the specific target of Kant's contradiction charge is Baumgarten, who holds both that existence is external to the concept of a thing and that it is contained in the concept of God. This cannot be right, though, because on Baumgarten's account existence is an external and contingent determination (i.e., mode) only of non-divine essences and an intrinsic and essential determination of the unique being that God is.

Obviously, the syntheticity of "God exists" alone would undermine the proof. As we will see, Kant presents this as a distinct objection later on. But here, he aims to show that considering "God exists" as an analytic proposition on the grounds that existence is contained in the concept of God entails the identity of God *qua* the actual object and "God" *qua* our conceptual representation. It should be this absurdity that Kant must have in mind when he levels the contradiction charge. For it is indeed a contradiction to maintain at once that "God" is a mere concept and that actual existence, which is supposed to apply to God *qua* the object outside the mind, is contained in the mere concept "God". This is, I suggest, Kant's novel twist on the first line of historical objection to the inference from the conceived or mental to the actual or real existence on the ground that the former does not logically entail the latter. Here Kant replaces the language of dual existence with that of concept and object.

As his third salvo at the proof, Kant offers the second line of objection that aims to block the introduction of existence into the concept of God. He restates his thesis about the nature of the concept of existence, "Being is obviously not a real predicate" (*CPR* A 598/B 626), and claims that the proof treats "existence" as a real predicate and thereby falls for "the confusion of a logical predicate with a real one (i. e., the determination of a thing)" (*CPR* A 598/B 626). Thus, the meaning of Kant's thesis about existence is tied to that of the distinction between real and logical predicate.

This is not a distinction of mutual exclusion. For any term that occupies the predicate place in a proposition is a logical predicate: "Anything one likes can serve as a logical predicate, even the subject can be predicated of itself; for logic abstracts from every content" (*CPR* A 598/B 626). Whether the same term is also a real predicate or determination depends on the content of the proposition, or more specifically, whether or not it is already contained in the subject-concept. For "the determination is a predicate, which goes beyond the subject and enlarges it. Thus, it must not be included in it already" (*CPR* A 598/B 626). Thus, the distinction in question holds between the predicates that are merely logical and those that are also real predicates. It is best to understand the notion of a real predicate or determination against the background of the idea of complete determination. Accordingly, there are two conditions to consider in establishing whether a concept, P, is a real predicate. The first is a necessary and general, the second is a sufficient and subject-specific condition.

1. P must take part in the complete determination of at least one other concept, or must be contained in the intension of at least one other concept.
2. P is a real predicate of C iff P adds to C a further determination that is not already contained in its intension.

So the merely logical/ real predicate distinction is in fact context sensitive. However, Kant's thesis that existence is not a real predicate is a context-independent thesis and amounts to the radical claim that existence does not even satisfy the necessary and general condition of being a real predicate, for it cannot enter into the intension of any other concept and thus be part of its complete determination. This, I think, presents the true meaning of Kant's thesis. Yet this is not captured by the predominant interpretation of the thesis in the literature. According to this interpretation the thesis states that any object that instantiates a concept necessarily also instantiates the predicate "exists", which, in turn, entails that existence is a first-order and universal predicate of all (and not a subset of) objects.[12] On my interpretation, on the other hand, the thesis states quite the opposite: existence is not a first-order predicate of any (actual or possible) object and thus cannot be contained in the intension of the concept of any object, however determinate that concept may be. It is not that an object that instantiates a concept also instantiates "exists", but that existence is a predicate (not of the object but) of that concept expressing that it is actually instantiated by an object.

Despite the plethora of literature on what Kant's thesis really means, there is not much discussion of what argument Kant offers for it. This is crucial because the proponent of the proof does not have to accept this thesis without an independent argument for its truth. In the *CPR*, Kant offers the following grand argument for his thesis (T), utilizing another thesis (T*), which he originally formulates in the *Ground of Proof* essay, "Nothing more is posited in an existent thing than is posited in a merely possible thing" (*GP* 2:75.15–16), and restates in the first *Critique*, "The actual contains nothing more than the possible" (*CPR* A 599/B 627):

1. If existence were a real predicate (~T), then the actual object would instantiate more, i.e., positive predicates, than is contained in the concept of it as merely possible (~T*).
2. The actual object would not instantiate more than is contained in the concept of it as merely possible (T*).

---

12 For instance, Malcolm (1960, 44) takes the thesis to entail that one and the same object could satisfy two separate descriptions of a term that are identical except that one includes existence and the other does not. Plantinga (1967, 35) claims that given that C1 and C3 are identical concepts of an object except C3 lacks existence, "[T]here are no possible circumstances in which C3 but not C1 has application; it is a necessary truth that if C3 is exemplified, so is C1. Since the converse is also true". Barnes (1972, 46) and van Cleve (1999, 188) formulate the same view of the thesis, respectively, in terms of the proposition "For any property F and any object x: x is F iff x is an existent F" and "There is no concept C such that $\Diamond \exists x$ (Cx $\wedge$ -Ex)". And most recently, Stang (2016, 38–40) claims that the thesis means that "Existence" and "Non-existence" do not divide the extension of any concept such that any object that instantiates a concept C necessarily also instantiates (or falls under the extension of) "exists".

3. Therefore, existence is not a predicate (T).

Based on my account of what T means, it is clear that this T is entailed by T* and the argument is valid. For if existence were a real predicate, then more content would certainly be posited if one posited an object as actual than they posited it as merely possible. The question here is why we have to hold T*. Kant's famous "hundred dollars" argument supports T*:

> The actual contains nothing more than the merely possible. A hundred actual dollars do not contain the least bit more than a hundred possible ones. For since the latter signifies the concept and the former its object and its positing in itself, then in the case the former contained more than the latter, my concept would not express the entire object and thus would not be the suitable concept of it. (*CPR* A 599/B 627)

This argument is best understood in reference to the notion of "complete concept", an idea of reason that the critical Kant thinks our discursive minds can never really attain but nevertheless uses as a rhetorical tool to emphasize that existence would not even be contained in any mental representation of an object, no matter how determinate it may be.[13] The complete concept of an object represents that object with respect to all of the predicates it would have were it to actually exist. Kant's argument here is based on the premise that if the actual object instantiated more than what is contained in the complete concept of that object, then the complete concept of that object would not be representing that object completely but partially. Since the latter is impossible per the definition of complete concept, the former cannot be the case. Thus, the actual object cannot instantiate more than what is contained in the complete concept of that object (T*) and thereby, existence is not a real predicate contained in the concept of anything (T).

Kant takes it to be obvious that the proof of T is also the proof of the impossibility of the traditional ontological proof, which infers the existence of God from the concept of God as a merely possible object *a priori.* For such inference is only possible if God's existence is contained in the concept of God, which, in turn, is only possible, if existence is a real predicate of God. But if existence is not a real predicate of any object, then the proof does not even take off the ground since its first step of introducing existence into the concept of God is blocked.

Kant's refutation in the *CPR* has a fourth and unmistakably critical layer. While as we saw earlier, in his second attack, Kant entertains the syntheticity of

---

13 See, for instance, *CPR* A 219 and *CPR* A 234/B 287. Compare also R 5590 (*Notes and Fragments* 18:242.24–6); R 6298 (*Notes and Fragments* 18:565.18–23). For English translations of Kant's notes and fragments, here and below, I use my own translations.

existential propositions as a hypothesis, it is in fact clear that he holds that this is the case and must be accepted by the proponent of the proof "in all fairness" (*CPR* A 598/B 626). It is also clear that he takes the syntheticity of existential propositions to be a damning and independent objection to the proof. For if "God exists" is a synthetic proposition, then it is deniable without a logical contradiction, and cannot obtain with absolute logical necessity.

Although the compatibility of Kant's claim that existential propositions are synthetic with his thesis existence is not a real predicate has been seriously questioned in the literature, the assumption which grounds these incompatibility charges, i.e., that the syntheticity of a proposition requires its predicate to be a real (or synthetic) predicate in the sense of adding a further determination to its subject-concept, is misguided.[14] For Kant defines two kinds of syntheticity: objective and subjective. While the objective-synthetic propositions are those in which the predicate-concept adds a further determination to the subject-concept and thus is a real predicate, existential (and in fact all modal) propositions are subjective-synthetic in that they "do not in the least augment the concept of which they are asserted in such a way as to add something to the representation of the object" but "add to the concept of a thing (the real) [...] the cognitive power whence it arises and has its seat" (*CPR* A 234/B 286). Kant's postulates of modal categories specify this subjective addition in the case of possibility, existence, and necessity assertions, respectively, as that of an agreement with the formal conditions of experience in the understanding, a connection with perception, and a connection with perception through causal inferences of reason (*CPR* A 218/B 266). So in an existential proposition, then, the subject-concept is "synthesized" with a (direct or indirect) perception of the object. Such synthesis does not amplify the concept of the object by adding a further determination to it, but it does amplify our cognition in general by adding to this concept a connection with an actual perception of the object and thus locating its object in the context of experience. This also specifies the epistemic conditions of the cognitive act that Kant calls "absolute positing" (*GP* 2:73.20, *CPR* A 598/B 626) and claims to be what is taking place in existential assertions instead of further determination of the subject-concept. Accordingly, a positive existential proposition involves the absolute positing of a subject-concept as instantiated by an object of a (direct or indirect) perception. Thus, while the synthetic character of existential propositions specifically undermines the ontological proof's claim to the logical necessity of its conclusion, the epistemic con-

---

14 See, for instance, Schaffer (1962, 309), Everitt (2004, 52), and Goodman (1996, 67). See also Stang (2016, 37), for a detailed rebuttal of the inconsistency charge.

ditions that Kant's critical philosophy places on existence assertions rule out the possibility of *a priori* cognition of existence in general.

2 The "Only Possible" Proof

The pre-critical Kant states his own ontological proof in three different texts. First, in 1755 in the *New Elucidation* (1:395.4–25), then, with more detail but not much substantive difference, in 1763 in the *Ground of Proof* essay (2:77.5–84.8), and finally, very concisely, in 1764 in the *Distinctness* (2:296.32–7.13).[15]

Kant presents his own proof as an alternative to the traditional version of the ontological proof. The traditional version purports to demonstrate the existence of God as an absolute logical necessity. Yet, as we saw above, Kant insists that since existence is not a real predicate, no existence whatsoever is a logical necessity. In other words, absolute nothingness is a state of logical possibility, since, in that case, there would be no predicate of any subject left to generate a contradiction in the first place, or what is the same, all existence, including the existence of God, if any, has to be logically contingent. Consequently, another, i.e., non-logical, notion of necessity should capture the necessity of divine existence, and thus, a corresponding, non-logical notion of possibility should be introduced. This need for a new conception of modality is the fundamental insight that motivates Kant's own proof.

Thus, the proof turns on a non-logical, i.e., real or metaphysical, conception of modality. Logical modality is the modality of mere thinking and is properly predicated of our conceptual representations of things rather than things themselves. Accordingly, logical possibility expresses the possibility of thinking something through a concept or proposition without a logical contradiction, and logical necessity expresses the necessity of thinking the connection of concepts within a proposition such that its negation results in a logical contradiction. Real modality, on the other hand, is the modality of the existence of the thing in question, i.e. whether the thing or its state can exist, and if it actually exists, whether it does so necessarily. Now, the starting premise of Kant's proof is a definition of real possibility,

---

15 Schönfeld (2000, 197) claims that one can find the "germ" of this proof in Kant's 1759 essay *Optimism.* However, this is not so obvious. While the "beautiful proof" that Kant refers to in R 3704 (*Notes and Fragments* 17:233.18) seems to take God to be the ground of the possibility of all properties of things, it specifies this grounding in terms of the collective harmony of the properties to give complete expression to God's perfection. It is thus unclear how this argument can move from mere possibility in general to the actuality of God without presupposing the latter as well as such a teleological principle of harmony.

which involves what I call the "Actualist Principle" (AP), a modal version of the PSR, stating that real possibility must be grounded in actuality:

> Something is (absolutely) really possible, iff i) its conceptual representation is logically possible, i. e., its predicates are logically compatible, and ii) it is grounded in actuality, i. e., each of its predicates is grounded through either the actual instantiation of itself or of a more fundamental predicate from which it can be derived (AP).[16]

The proof proceeds from this premise in two major steps.[17] It establishes, first, the (real) necessity of the existence of something (as opposed to nothing), and second, the (real) necessity of the existence of a particular being. These two steps employ definitions of real impossibility and necessity, the key for both of which is the question of what cancels real possibility. A particular real possibility is cancelled when a) its logical/ formal component is cancelled, i. e., there is a logical contradiction between its predicates, and b) its real/ material component is cancelled, i. e., its predicates are not grounded in actuality in the way prescribed by the AP. Now, the state of absolute nothingness does not generate any logical contradiction and thus does not cancel the logical component of any real possibility. However, in absolute nothingness no material ground for any predicates is to be found and thus the real/ material component of all real possibility gets cancelled. Kant derives a *de dicto* conception of absolute real impossibility from such cancellation of all real possibility. Accordingly, it is (*de dicto*) absolutely really impossible that P iff P is a state in which all real possibility is cancelled. Thus, it is absolutely really impossible that nothing at all should exist. Through conversion ($\Box$P ↔¬ $\Diamond$¬P, where P is "something exists"), it follows that it is absolutely really necessary that something exists rather than nothing.

While this (*de dicto*) conclusion establishes the necessity of there being some ground of all real possibility, it leaves the quantity and character of this ground indeterminate. All real possibility can be grounded either by multiple discrete actual beings distributively or by one actual being single-handedly. The second step

---

16 Chignell (2009, 2012) has repeatedly argued that Kant has in mind a third condition here, according to which the real possibility of something requires that its predicates be "really harmonious" or metaphysically compatible with each other. I have offered my detailed criticism of Chignell's "real harmony" reading in Abaci (2014). For another objection to Chignell, see also Yong (2014), and for Chignell's response to me and Yong, see Chignell (2014). The reconstruction I offer here shows, at least, that the proof does not need a "real harmony" condition on real possibility for it to generate the desired conclusion.

17 I have defended the plausibility of this reconstruction of Kant's proof in Abaci (2014) and Abaci (2016). For alternative reconstructions see Chignell (2009), Stang (2010), Boehm (2012), and Yong (2014).

of the argument aims to rule out the former case and prove that there is a unique (*de re*) absolutely really necessary being which grounds all real possibility. The cancellation of all real possibility is again the core of Kant's *de re* conception of absolute real necessity here. A being is absolutely really necessary iff its non-existence cancels the entire material ground of all real possibility, or as he puts it, "all the data of all that can be thought" (*GP* 2:82.28).[18] This, however, is only a definition and does not warrant the existence of such a being or rule out the case in which multiple actual beings altogether ground all real possibility. So the transition to the desired conclusion requires the additional premise that the all real possibility must be materially grounded by one actual being. Kant explicitly commits to this premise: "All possibility presupposes something actual in and through which all that can be thought is given" (*GP* 2:83.3–4). Of course, such a being would satisfy the definition of *de re* really necessity and thus would be an absolutely really necessary being. And since this being single-handedly grounds the entire matter (i. e., all possible predicates) of all real possibility, it must (*via* the AP) instantiate all of the most fundamental predicates from which all other predicates can be derived. Hence, the conclusion: There exists an absolutely really necessary being (i. e. *ens necessarium*), and this is a being that instantiates all of the most fundamental predicates (i. e. *ens realissimum*). The proof's success obviously depends on the justifiability of the premise that all real possibility must be grounded in one actual being, and, even more fundamentally, of the AP itself. Kant offers no justification for either of these premises in the *Ground of Proof* essay. One natural question for the fate of the proof would thus be whether Kant will later refute the proof on the basis of this problem.

Interestingly enough, Kant's later attitude toward the proof is not one of refutation or abandonment. Instead, he comes to adopt a more nuanced, dual perspective: he retains the *subjective validity* of the deductive structure of the proof to the extent that he even declares it irrefutable, but no longer regards it to establish an *objectively valid* existential conclusion. In the *Pölitz* lectures on theology, he is reported to say:

> [E]ven this proof is not apodictically certain; for it cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being, but establishes only the subjective necessity of assuming such a being. But this proof can in no way be refuted, because it has its ground in the nature of human reason. For my reason makes it absolutely necessary for me to assume a being, which is the ground of everything possible. (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1034.13–19)

---

18 Kant formulates the corresponding kind of *de re* impossibility as well: "That by means of which all [real] possibility is cancelled, is absolutely [really] impossible" (*GP* 2:79.3–4).

There is ample textual evidence that Kant's realization that the proof is merely subjectively valid, demonstrating only the subjective necessity of the idea of God as a hypothesis of human reason, goes back to late 1760s and early 1770s.[19] However, it is widely accepted that there is an account of Kant's downgrading of his own "only possible proof" from objectively valid to subjectively valid in the *CPR*'s "Ideal of Pure Reason", particularly sections 2 and 3, before his refutation of the all the other three possible proofs, i.e., ontological (traditional version), cosmological, and teleological proofs. The disagreement in the literature is about what exactly prompts this downgrading.[20]

It is challenging to find an unambiguous exposition of why the proof fails in the "Ideal", because the "Ideal" does not make any direct and explicit reference to the proof as such but presents its deductive structure (or something very similar to it) as a natural procedure of human reason in the context of the doctrine of transcendental illusion. It is thus crucial to identify what Kant construes as the relevant illusion in the proof and the specific metaphysical error that it leads to. Now, while the proof in its original statements in the *New Elucidation* and *Ground of Proof* essay is a direct argument for the existence of *ens realissimum*, Kant, in the "Ideal", divides the rational procedure in which he reframes the proof into two parts: first, the generation of the idea of *ens realissimum* or "the ideal of pure reason" itself, and second, the hypostatization of this idea or attributing an actual object to this idea. He takes the former to be a subjectively necessary or unavoidable procedure of pure reason and the latter is still a rationally appealing procedure but one that involves an avoidable yet erroneous judgment due to an illusion. Hence, his dual perspective on the proof as having a subjectively valid deductive form and yet, due to an error, resulting in an objectively unwarranted existential conclusion. I will briefly look at Kant's respective accounts of both the generation and the hypostatization of the ideal to explain why and how he holds this perspective.

Kant's account of the generation of the ideal shares the general deductive form of the proof: an inference that proceeds from the possibility of individual things in general to the idea of a unique being materially grounding all possibility. His narrative is that once we think about individual possibilities, we are rationally com-

---

19 See in *Notes and Fragments* R 4113 (17:421.11–14), R 4244 (17:478.25–79.3), R 4249 (17:481.17–19), R 4253 (17:483.12), R 4261 (17:486.13–15), R 4345 (17:514.4–6), R 4568 (17:596.22–5), R 4580 (17:600.12–17), R 4585 (17:602.2–6), R 4587 (17:602.12–17), R 4729 (17:690.1–3), R 5492 (18:19.22–4), R 5508 (18:203.7–8), R 5522 (18:207.3–6), R 5525 (18:208.9–13), R 5569 18:236.2–4).

20 For different views on this question, see, for instance, England (1930, ch. 5–6), Henrich, (1960, 143), Wood (1978, 73–9), Fisher and Watkins (1998, 370, 393), Logan (2007, 347), Chignell (2009, 190), and Boehm (2012, 313).

pelled to presuppose the idea of *ens realissimum* as their ultimate material ground. Yet one significant difference between the original statement of the proof and Kant's account in the "Ideal" is that in the latter he employs the "principle of complete determination" as the motor of the inference: "Every thing, however, as to its possibility, further stands under the principle of thoroughgoing determination; according to which, among all possible predicates of things, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it" (*CPR* A 571–2/B 600–1). Unlike his predecessors like Wolff and Baumgarten, who take this principle to offer a necessary as well as sufficient condition of existence, Kant interprets this principle to state only a necessary condition of real possibility, and clearly notes that complete determinacy does not entail or warrant existence.[21] Accordingly, something is really possible only if it is completely determined (positively or negatively) with respect to all possible predicates, or what is the same, nothing is really possible as incompletely determined. This, Kant points out, invokes "a transcendental presupposition, namely that of the material of all possibility, which is supposed to contain a priori the data for the particular possibility of every thing" (*CPR* A 572–3/B 600–1). That is, conceiving the real possibility of an individual thing requires conceiving it as thoroughly determined, which in turn requires the complete concept of that thing as determined with respect to all possible predicates. And in order for us to form such a concept, the stock of all possible predicates must be available in the first place.

However, first of all, if the search here is for the ultimate material ground of all real possibility, this raw, indiscriminate aggregate of all possible predicates should be refined by leaving out the negative and derivative predicates. This refined totality or "All of reality" (*omnitudo realitatis*) would be a "transcendental substratum, which contains as it were the entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken" (*CPR* A 575/B 603), by derivation (i. e., negation and limitation). Second, the idea of *omnitudo realitatis* is in fact thoroughly determinate, and is the representation of a unique individual in possession of all fundamental predicates, i. e., the *ens realissimum.* "Only in this one single case is an—in itself universal—concept of one thing thoroughly determined through itself, and cognized as the representation of an individual" (*CPR* A 576 /B 604).[22] Thus is the generation of the idea of *ens realissimum.*

---

21 See Wolff, *Ontologia* (1736 in 1977, §225); Baumgarten, *Metaphysics* (1757 in 2013, §148), and compare R 6291 (*Notes and Fragments* 18:560.2–10). See also *GP* 2:76.5–77.4, for Kant's explicit criticism of Baumgarten's use of the principle.

22 In the reiteration of the ideal in the *Pölitz* lectures, Kant refers to perfections, or unlimited and unconditioned realities, e. g. Omniscience, Omnipotence, Eternity, as the divine predicates that ground all other realities (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1015.25–34).

One might wonder why Kant resorts to this principle here even though he does not mention it at all in the original statement of the proof. It is suggestive that in a critical period reflection, Kant refers to the principle in his characterization of the proof: "Even if through this proof the objective necessity of the highest being is not established, the subjective necessity of a hypothesis of this being as the substrati of all possibility (the complete determination of every thing in general) is established" (R 6293, *Notes and Fragments* 18:561.11–562.2). This might mean that the critical Kant holds that the principle was implicitly at work in the proof and he now makes it explicit. In line with this, it would also be plausible to think that now that Kant sees the proof as rooted in the nature of human reason, he wants to emphasize the purely rational and dialectical nature of the inference from possibilities to their ultimate ground or substratum. As I noted in the previous section, the critical Kant holds that the very notion of a complete concept of a thing and the corresponding notion of complete possibility are merely rational ideas, which reason would never actually attain and yet is urged to pursue because of its demand for completeness. Accordingly, it is this rational pursuit of the complete real possibilities of individuals which necessarily presupposes the idea of *ens realissimum* as the ultimate material ground. It is because of its purely rational character that this inference can only secure the merely subjective necessity of a concept, i. e., the idea of *ens realissimum*, with no existential import. Kant states that, "with this aim [...] reason does not presuppose the existence of a being conforming to the ideal but only the idea of such a being" (*CPR* A 577–8 /B 605–6); or reason presupposes the concept of *ens realissimum* "without demanding that this reality should be given objectively, and itself constitute a thing" (*CPR* A 580/B 608). The relation of the *ens realissimum* to the individuals is therefore not to be regarded as "the objective relation of an actual object to other things," but only as "that of an idea to concepts", and "as to the existence of a being of such preeminent excellence [this relation] leaves us in complete ignorance" (*CPR* A 579/B 607). More specifically, the material grounding of real possibilities in question here does not require the instantiation of predicates in actual things but expresses only a conceptual condition of there being content or data in the logical space for our mere thought of the real possibilities of things in abstraction from the conditions of the actual givenness of any data to our cognition. So, the generation of the ideal operates on a merely conceptual and existentially neutral level and amounts to the necessary presupposition of a concept rather than that of the existence of an object. Of course, someone like Baumgarten might still insist that the ideal, as the concept of a completely determinate being, entails the existence of its object, *ens realissimum*.[23] However,

---

23 In fact, Baumgarten offers a distinct proof of God's existence on the basis of the complete de-

since Kant does not take complete determinacy to be a sufficient condition of existence and in fact separates existence from the intensional content of any concept and the level of its determinacy, he would not be swayed by this point.

It is then obvious that the illusion in the inference, for Kant, would be mistaking "the subjective necessity of a connection of our concepts" for "an objective necessity in the determination of things themselves" (*CPR* A 297/B 354), or mistreating or "hypostatizing" a mere idea, which serves as the conceptual condition of thinking possibilities, as an actual object. But what specific error would result in this illicit move and where exactly is that error in the proof? Now, one could readily see here that Kant's thesis that existence is not a real predicate that can be contained in the concept of anything would undermine any existential conclusion derived from a rational inference operating only on a conceptual level. However, Kant does not use this objection against his own proof as he does against the traditional version. For although Kant's proof erroneously derives an actual object from a mere concept without epistemic warrant, it does not do so by treating existence as a real predicate. Instead, as we saw above, the key for the proof's existential claim is the actualist principle, which states that the matter of real possibilities must be grounded in actuality. We can, therefore, project that given that the critical Kant holds that the existential conclusion of the proof is ungrounded, he must think that there is something wrong with the principle itself or at least with the way in which he interpreted it in his original, pre-critical presentation of the proof. There is one other clue. While the principle and thus the proof as a whole operate upon the notions of *absolute* real possibility and *absolute* real necessity, understood as ontological features of things as they are considered in themselves or without regard to the conditions of their givenness to us, the critical Kant redefines modal notions in the "Postulates" as expressing the ways in which the representations of objects are related to our empirical cognition against the background of its conditions. Obviously, this redefinition restricts the validity of our assertions of real modality to the realm of our possible experience, that is, to the (relative) real modalities of appearances. Thus, on a fundamental level, Kant's critical conception of modality does not support the conclusion of the proof, positing an absolutely really necessary thing as the ground of absolute real possibilities of things. Then, we can further project that Kant's rejection of the particular interpretation of the actualist principle in the proof and his consequent downgrading of the proof might be based on this very shift in his understanding of modality in general.

---

terminacy of the concept of *ens realissimum*. See his *Metaphysics* (1757 in 2013, §§823–5). See also Stang (2016, 56–65) for an elaborate reconstruction of this proof.

Kant's account of the hypostatization of the ideal confirms these projections. Pointing out that the answer to the question "how does reason come to regard all the possibility of things as derived from [...] a particular original being" should be sought in "the discussions of the Transcendental Analytic", he offers what I take to be a critically informed interpretation of the actualist principle:

> The possibility of objects of sense is a relation of these objects to our thought, in which something (namely the empirical form) can be thought a priori, but what constitutes the material, the reality in appearance (corresponding to sensation) has to be given; without that nothing at all could be thought and hence no possibility could be represented. (*CPR* A 581/B 609)

The notion of possibility that is at stake here is that of real possibility relative to the realm of human experience, defined by the first postulate as "agree[ment] with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts)" (*CPR* A 218/B 266). Accordingly, a really possible object of experience must be something that is receivable through space and time, and thinkable through the categories. However, despite the formalism in this definition, Kant's elucidation of the postulate of possibility reveals that our cognition of real possibility requires also a material consideration that involves the actual content as well as the form of experience.[24] In order for us to positively verify that a particular object is really possible, the concept of this object must be "borrowed from experience", which means that the synthesis of the individual predicates of the object in question must be empirically exemplified, that is, actually instantiated. Our attempts to construct new concepts of objects by combining the predicates we have separately acquired in experience, "without borrowing the example of their connection from experience" run the risk of "end[ing] up with figments of the brain, for the [real] possibility of which there would be no indications at all" (*CPR* A 222), even if there is not a logical contradiction in those concepts or an apparent incompatibility between them and the formal conditions of experience. In this particular sense, our cognition of real possibility is dependent on and bound by our cognition of actuality.

Thus this critical version of the AP differs from the original, pre-critical version of it in two significant ways. First, while the pre-critical version applies to absolute real possibilities of things in general or in abstraction from their relation to our cognition, the critical one applies to (relative) real possibilities of objects of our empirical cognition. Second, while the pre-critical version expresses an ontological condition (*ratio essendi*) of real possibility as such, i.e., real possibility (of things) requires a material ground in actuality, the critical version offers an epistemolog-

---

24 I have offered a detailed defense of this view in Abaci (2016).

ical condition of our cognition (*ratio cognoscendi*) of real possibility, i.e., our cognition of real possibility (of empirical objects) requires a material ground in our cognition of actuality. Obviously, the critical version is not suitable for the ontological ambitions of the proof. On the other hand, from the critical viewpoint, whether the pre-critical or ontological version of the principle actually holds, i.e., whether absolute real possibilities (of things) themselves are dependent on the actuality of their matter, is a matter of speculation. However, Kant claims that human reason is tempted to omit the critical restrictions on the AP and ends up hypostatizing the idea of the ultimate material ground of all real possibility:

> In accordance with a natural illusion, we regard as a principle that must hold of all things in general that which properly holds only of those which are given as objects of our senses. Consequently, through the omission of this limitation we will take the empirical principle of our concepts of the possibility of things as appearances to be a transcendental principle of the possibility of things in general. (*CPR* A 582/B 610)

Thus is then Kant's critical diagnosis of the proof's failure: the proof conflates two different conditions or principles (i.e., ontological and epistemological) in its foundational premise. It treats a principle about our representation of relative (real) possibilities of appearances as a transcendental principle about the absolute (real) possibilities of things in general. I suggested earlier that the other crucial premise of the proof, i.e., all real possibility must be materially grounded by a single actual being, is also suspect. In fact, Kant's detailed account of the hypostatization of the ideal reframes this premise in terms of another metaphysical error instigated by a natural illusion of pure reason, i.e., treating a distributive unity as a collective unity.[25] However, this premise, though it is indispensable to the conclusion of the proof, is still less fundamental than and even derivative of the actualist principle. So Kant's downgrading of his proof is most fundamentally due to the shift in his conception of actualism with regard to possibility, which, in turn, reflects a much broader shift in his overall understanding of the nature of modality.

It would thus be fair to conclude that the continuity in Kant's critique of the traditional proof reflects the continuity in his conception of existence, according to which existence is not a real predicate or determination that can be part of the intension of the concept of any object. The shift in Kant's attitude to his own proof is due to that in his conception of real modality and the consequent reinterpretation of the material dependence of possibility on actuality. While the conception of existence that Kant has retained all along makes the inference in the tradi-

---

25 For two alternative accounts of how the critical Kant ties this premise to the dialectic of pure reason, see Boehm (2012) and Abaci (2017).

tional proof from the possible as a *ground* to the existence of God as a *consequence* impossible, his critical redefinition of real possibility and necessity, in line with his longstanding conception of existence, as expressing not real predicates of objects themselves but ways in which the representations of objects are related to our cognition makes the inference in his "only possible" proof from the possible as a *consequence* to the divine existence as a *ground* impossible. In other words, the critical turn in Kant's conception of modality in general leaves no room for the possibility of any ontological proof that would derive the existence of God from the concepts of the merely possible.

References

Abaci, Uygar, "Kant's Only Possible Argument and Chignell's Real Harmony," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 1–25.

Abaci, Uygar, "The Coextensiveness Thesis and Kant's Modal Agnosticism in the 'Postulates'," *European Journal of Philosophy* 24.1 (2016), 129–58.

Abaci, Uygar, "Kant, the Actualist Principle, and the Fate of the Only Possible Proof," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55.2 (2017), 261–91.

Abaci, Uygar, *Kant's Revolutionary Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Anselm (1078), "Proslogion," in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 75–114.

Aquinas, St. Thomas (1485), *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), vol. 1.

Boehm, Omri, "Kant's Regulative Spinozism," *Kant-Studien* 103 (2012), 312–17.

Barnes, Jonathan, *The Ontological Argument* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972).

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb (1739/⁴1757), *Metaphysics: A Critical Translation with Kant's Elucidations, Selected Notes and Related Materials*, ed. and trans. by Courtney Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Caterus, Johannes (1641), "First Set of Objections," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vol. 2, 66–73.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91.2 (2009), 157–92.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant, Real Possibility and the Threat of Spinoza," *Mind* 121.483 (2012), 635–75.

Crusius, Christian August (1766), "Entwurf der Nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten [Entwurf]," in *Die philosophischen Hauptwerke*, ed. by Giorgio Tonelli (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), vol. 2.

Descartes, René (1641), "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vol. 2, 1–62.

England, Frederick Ernest, *Kant's Conception of God* (New York: Dial Press, 1930).

Everitt, Nicholas, *The Non-Existence Of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

Fisher, Mark/ Watkins, Eric, "Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility: From The Only Possible Argument to The Critique of Pure Reason," *Review of Metaphysics* 52.2 (1998), 369–95.

Forgie, Wiliam, "Gassendi and Kant on Existence," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 45.4 (2007), 511–23.

Gaunilo (1078), "Gaunilo's Reply on Behalf of the Fool," in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 105–14.

Goodman, Lenn, *God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Henrich, Dieter, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis: Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960).

Leibniz, Gottfried, Wilhelm (1714), "The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology," in *Philosophical Essays,* ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 213–25.

Logan, Ian, "Whatever Happened to Kant's Ontological Argument?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74.2 (2007), 346–63.

Malcolm, Norman, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *The Philosophical Review* 69.1 (1960), 41–62.

Plantinga, Alvin, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

Proops, Ian, "Kant on the Ontological Argument," *Nous* 49.1 (2015), 1–27.

Sala, Giovanni B., *Kant und die Frage nach Gott: Gottesbeweise und Gottesbeweiskritik in den Schriften Kants* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1990).

Schaffer, Jerome, "Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument," *Mind* 71.283 (1962), 307–25.

Schmucker, Joseph, *Die Ontotheologie des vorkritischen Kant* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1980).

Schönfeld, Martin, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Stang, Nicholas F., "Kant's Possibility Proof," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.3 (2010), 275–99.

Stang, Nicholas F., "Kant's Argument that Existence is not a Determination," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91.1 (2015), 583–626.

Stang, Nicholas F., *Kant's Modal Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Wolff, Christian (1736), *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia* [*Ontologia*] (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1977).

Wolff, Christian (1740), *Philosophia rationalis sive Logica* [*Logica*] (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1983).

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

Yong, Peter, "God, Totality and Possibility in Kant's Only Possible Argument," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 27–51.

Allen W. Wood
Kant's Moral Argument for Belief in God

Among the most dramatic changes in Kant's philosophy between the so-called "pre-critical" period and his philosophy after the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) has to do with his conception of the relation of philosophy to the belief in God. Prior to the first *Critique*, Kant accepted a theoretical proof for the existence of a most real being (*ens realissimum*). As early as the *Nova dilucidatio* of 1755, and especially in *The Only Possible Ground of Proof for a Demonstration of God's Existence* (1763), he mounted criticisms of the traditional theoretical proofs for God's existence—to which he later gave the names, respectively, "ontological," "cosmological" and "physicotheological" (*NE* 1:394–5, *NE* 1:396–8, *GP* 2:72.1–77.4, *GP* 2:116.1–123.14). But he also devised his own proof, based on the idea that the real existence of an *ens realissimum* is required as a material condition of all possible things, thus of possibility in general, so that God's existence is necessary (*NE* 1:395–6, *GP* 2:77.5–87.17). This amounted to the claim that God's existence could be theoretically demonstrated, and that we have theoretical cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of God and knowledge (*Wissen*) of God's existence.

In the first *Critique*, however, Kant has abandoned the project of theistic proof. In its place he puts an argument for assent to the existence of God on practical grounds. Or as he famously declared it in the second edition: "I had to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*" (*CPR* B xxx). This argument is prominently featured in all three *Critiques*, in the "Preface" to the *Religion*, and in other essays. It has been generally misunderstood and misestimated, partly just because it has a theistic or religious aim, and partly because it is mistakenly compared to the theoretical proofs Kant rejects and then seen as something "weaker" than they are when the same aim is attributed to it. I hope in this essay we can correct the misunderstanding and misestimate of this important argument, whose essence (as I will try to show) is a powerful point about the relation between purposive assent and rational action, a point which, once we understand it should matter to all of us, religious believers and unbelievers alike.

Kant's shift from theoretical to practical reason as regards theistic argument was central to the initial favorable reception of the critical philosophy. It took fully five years before Kant's critical philosophy began to be appreciated for the important development it was. The principal vehicle for its initial positive reception was the series of "Letters on the Kantian Philosophy" by Karl Leonhard Rein-

hold, published in the *Teutsche Merkur* starting in August, 1786.[1] Reinhold gave prominence to the way in which Kant's moral defense of faith in God finds a third way between "rationalism" (or "neologism") and "pietism" (or "fideism"). It avoids the extremes that had recently come to be associated, respectively, with Mendelssohn and Jacobi in their famous (or notorious) dispute over Lessing's alleged Spinozism.[2] According to Reinhold, Kant defends a healthy kind of religious belief both against the "pietists" who seemed to be supporting authority and unreason, while also avoiding "rationalist" metaphysical demonstrations that were vulnerable to subtle objections and perhaps even led (as Jacobi had argued) to religious heterodoxy.

It may be difficult for us today to think of Kant's doctrine of moral faith as central to his critical philosophy. This is partly because the reception of Kant, and especially of his first *Critique*, has long since come to center on quite different issues, such as the meaning of transcendental idealism, the transcendental deduction of the categories and Kant's response to the Humean problem of causality. Further, it has seemed bewildering to many just how Kant's arguments are supposed to establish the *theoretical* conclusion that there is a God based on reasoning about what we ought to *will.* How can there be a practical argument for a theoretical conclusion? Kant also seems to have altered the propositional attitude we are supposed to take toward God's existence—as he puts it, from "knowledge" (*Wissen*) to "faith" (*Glaube*). It is not entirely clear what sort of theoretical conclusion the moral argument can entitle us to draw, if our belief in God cannot be based directly on arguments purporting to establish the truth of what is to be believed. We will address this issue presently in §1 and then again at the end in §6.

Some further puzzles about Kant's moral argument arise from the fact that the moral argument itself underwent significant changes, especially between its initial statement in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and later statements that postdate Kant's first formulation of his mature moral philosophy in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). There are changes both in the way belief in God is supposed to be required by moral volition toward the highest good, and in our moral reason for pursuing the highest good. These changes affect the way the moral argument works, and also the nature of the doxastic attitude it purports to justify.

---

1 The now standard edition of the letters is Reinhold (1923).
2 For a discussion of Reinhold's letters, and their emphasis on Kant's moral faith, see Beiser (1987, 232–6).

My aim here will be to look at the moral argument as it appears in all three *Critiques*, and to try to get clear both on how the argument works, and on the differences among the versions we find in each of the *Critiques.*

1 The Basic Structure of Kant's Moral Argument for God's Existence

In all its forms, Kant's moral argument rests on a single basic and powerful idea, whose force has seldom been appreciated, largely because the aim of the argument is theistic, and people are irrationally distracted by the G-word. The aim of the argument is to present rational considerations in favor of assenting to theoretical claims based not on theoretical proofs or evidence but rather on the rational requirements for setting an end. In all forms of the argument, the end in question is the highest good (*summum bonum*), which consists of two heterogeneous parts, with the goodness of the second part conditional on the first. The first or *supreme* good (*bonum supremum*) is morality or virtue; the second is happiness or well-being, whose goodness is conditional on its combination with morality, since morality constitutes the worthiness to be happy. The two together constitute the total or complete good (*bonum consummatum*).

But it may be best *not* to begin with this doctrine, partly because its motivations in Kant's philosophy are various and complex, and partly because this focus is part of the distraction mentioned above. More essential for the purpose of understanding Kant's moral argument, is the basic idea connecting purposive action with theoretical assent to which the argument appeals in fundamental distinction between two kinds of desire or volition, which goes back at least as far as Aristotle: the distinction between *wish* and *choice* (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.2.1111b7–30). If we find some object attractive, but do not intend to take any action to bring it about, then we *wish* for the object but we do not *will* it. That is, we do not set it as an end of action, or choose to do anything regarded as a means to it (*GMM* 4:394.13–28, *CPJ* 5:177.21–35, 178.16–37, *Anthropology* 7:251.3–14). One reason for this may be that we do not regard ourselves as having any means of bringing about the desired object, or even of doing anything that might tend to bring it about. But if we set an object as our end, we must take ourselves to have the *means* to bring it about, at least the means to do something that would tend to bring it about (*GMM* 4:427.19–26).

These features of purposive action set up a rational relation between the act of setting some object as an end and theoretical assent at least to its possibility and our contribution to making it actual. We need not regard our action toward the

end as *certain* to achieve it, but we violate a norm of reason—involving ourselves in some sort of rational incoherence between our actions and our theoretical assents—if we set some object as an end but decline to assent to the claim that the object is at least *possible* of achievement and that our actions are at least *possible* contributions to bringing it about. Conversely, if we do set some object as an end, we are then rationally committed to assent at least to its possibility, and to there being actions of ours that can at least contribute to making it actual.

Now it might seem that this relation could work in only one direction, from theoretical assent to the possibility of the object to our setting it as an end. We might suppose, that is, that in order rationally to set some object as an end, we must *first* establish through theoretical evidence or argument that it is possible, and that some act of ours would tend to make it actual; only *then,* we might think, would it be rational to set it as an end. But this is true only in the case where theoretical grounds alone either make it *certain* that the object is impossible or else make it *certain* that we are powerless to contribute to its actuality. In cases where the possibility of an object and our possible contribution to its actuality remain theoretically uncertain, it could still be rational to set the object as an end, as long as we also accept a commitment to assent to the object's possibility and to our being able to make some contribution to making it actual.

As Kant puts it: "Once an end is proposed, the conditions for attaining it are hypothetically necessary" (*CPR* A 823/B 851). The necessity, however, is only "subjective" and assent to the necessary conditions is only "subjectively sufficient" (*CPR* A 822–3/B 850–1). That is, I acquire a rational ground for assenting to the possibility of an object as an effect of my action only because I have chosen to set the end. Setting the end is up to me, because it is always an act of freedom (*MM* 6:381.4–9). The same ground of theoretical assent does not exist for someone who has not freely chosen to set the end; that makes this ground of theoretical assent "subjective," even though it is also an entirely *rational* ground of assent, hence (as Kant also puts it) a ground of *conviction*, not merely of *persuasion* (*CPR* A 820/B 848).

A clear and accessible case of this is what Kant calls 'pragmatic belief' (*CPR* A 824/B 852). Suppose a physician examines a patient suffering from some respiratory symptoms. It is her responsibility to do something to help the patient. It cannot be known with certainty in advance whether this is possible, and it is also uncertain what disease the patient has. For good *practical* reasons, however—the patient's need, the physician's professional responsibility—she sets the end of improving the patient's condition. In order to take some action as a means to this end, she must not only assent to the claim that helping the patient is possible, but must also assent to some hypothesis about the correct diagnosis and treatment of the patient's disease. Kant assumes she does this in part on the basis of evidence, but the evidence alone does not justify any particular diagnosis. It must

be at least partly for practical reasons, therefore, that the physician assents to whatever diagnosis provides the basis for her treatment. In Kant's example, the physician assents for pragmatic reasons to the diagnosis that the patient has consumption (*phthisis*) and thus chooses those actions that would count as the most effective treatment for this ailment. Her theoretical acts of assent are then rational, but also subjective, in the sense that they are based on her choice to set an end and take means to it. Another physician having the same knowledge and expertise, but no responsibility to treat this patient might simply suspend judgment about what is ailing the patient, and even whether the patient's condition can be effectively treated at all. For this second, merely *observing* physician, the *practical* ground for the *treating* physician's diagnosis does not exist. This makes the treating physician's grounds for her assent subjective and practical; they are based on her free but rational choice to set the end of helping the patient.

Kant's moral argument for assent to the existence of God deploys these same considerations, but with crucial differences that distinguish *moral belief* from *pragmatic belief.* But we may wonder whether what Kant calls *Glaube* (belief, faith), the assent that is produced by the moral arguments, is really what we think of as *belief.* We will return to this question in §6, after we understand the argument itself better, and have reviewed the different forms it takes in the three *Critiques.* But it is worth our attention from the start that the basic reason for practical assent employed in Kant's moral argument for belief in God has many applications, both for religious and non-religious people. Any reflective rational person who cares about the fate of humanity is committed to some ends about which it cannot be known whether or how far they are attainable, but habitual assent to their attainability is rationally required if we are to set them as ends. These ends might include the achievement or preservation of the conditions of a free, just and democratic society, the liberation of some oppressed group, the overcoming of capitalism or other forms of inhumanity, and even the long term survival of the human species, which is threatened by human-caused disruption of the climate and ecology of the earth. We cannot rationally pursue any of these ends without being committed to assent to their possibility. Religious people might symbolize this assent as faith in a God who will help us achieve our good ends. But even the most stubborn unbeliever, if he or she is a decent human being, ought to be committed to pursue some of the ends just listed, and therefore committed to habitual assent to their possibility, in the same way that a Kantian is committed to make the highest good an end, and therefore to assent on practical grounds to its possibility. Kant's moral argument, therefore, represents a way of thinking about purposive action and practical assent that applies directly to virtually every thinking person. Those who are too quick to scorn Kant's moral argu-

ments for faith in God should realize that the essential idea of this argument applies directly and powerfully to their own lives and concerns.

Kant maintains, for reasons we consider presently, that every moral agent is obligated to make the highest good an end of action. He holds that it cannot be *known* (through evidence or theoretical proof) whether this end is possible of attainment through the actions taken toward it. This element in the argument is of a purely theoretical or metaphysical character; it is also entirely negative, consisting merely in the absence of theoretical grounds for regarding the highest good as either possible or impossible. But Kant also holds, based again on theoretical grounds—concerning the nature of the highest good as we must conceive it—that if it is possible, this could be only because there exists a supremely perfect —omniscient, omnipotent and morally perfect—author of nature, a God, who can bring it about that in the world happiness is proportioned to morality: to the worthiness to be happy. In order rationally to set the highest good as an end, therefore, we must assent to its possibility and therefore to the existence of God, since God's existence alone is the condition of the possibility of the highest good.

The basic *practical* structure of this argument for a *theoretical* conclusion is like that of the case of pragmatic belief. Theoretical assent becomes rational for someone who has set an end while being theoretically uncertain of its possibility, and therefore rationally must assent to the conditions of its possibility. Unlike the case of pragmatic belief, however, the obligation to set the highest good as an end is not contingent or discretionary, but universal: every agent is morally required to have this end. Further, the theoretical claim that connects the end with its possibility of attainment—the claim that there is a divine author of nature—is also the same for all moral agents (as well as being independent of specific theoretical considerations, as in the case of the physician's diagnosis). This makes the rational ground for assent to the existence of a God into a universal ground, which is the same for everyone. This ground, however, is still subjective, because setting the highest good as an end is still an act of freedom, something we might choose either to do or not choose to do; our practical ground for assent to the existence of God is dependent on our free choice to set this end. Of course a person who did not set the end could be faulted morally, for violating a duty, but that person would not have the rational ground for assent to God's existence that agents acquire when they do set the highest good as an end.

This, then, is the basic structure of Kant's moral argument. It shows why the argument could offer a ground for assent to the existence of God that is universally applicable to all moral agents and a ground of rational conviction, but also practical rather than theoretical, and subjective rather than objective. The theoretical background that is supposed to make these arguments convincing is also a general

one, based on the critical philosophy. It holds that decisive theoretical grounds can be given for assent to neither the existence nor the non-existence of God, hence also for neither the possibility nor the impossibility of the highest good. In light of these considerations, we may therefore set the highest good as an end, and thus acquire a practical ground for the conviction that there is a God.

In order to understand in more detail how Kant's moral argument works, therefore, we need to understand several other things: first, more precisely the nature of the highest good we are to set as an end; second, why we are morally required to set the highest good as an end; third, the connection that is supposed to obtain between the existence of God and the possibility of the highest good through the actions of ours that take the highest good as their end; and finally, the precise nature of the assent to God's existence that the argument is capable of justifying. These are matters regarding which Kant's formulations of the moral argument in the three *Critiques* differ from one another. Sometimes these differences are relatively minor, but in others the differences are significant. In particular, the moral argument in the first *Critique* is quite distinct from the argument presented in the second and third *Critiques.*

2 The Highest Good as an End

The idea of the highest good appears many times in Kant's philosophy. Even the term 'highest good' (*summum bonum*) is ambiguous, referring sometimes to one idea and sometimes to another. Many different yet often overlapping or intertwining reasons are given why the idea of the highest good is of interest to philosophy, and there are also different accounts given of the reason why every moral agent is obligated to make the highest good an end. In this discussion I cannot hope to untangle or give order to all these matters.[3] But I will try to say what the term 'highest good' seems to mean in each of the three *Critiques* when Kant claims that moral agents must make the highest good an end, and how that claim motivates the moral argument for the existence of God.

One thing that seems to remain constant in Kant's conception of the highest good is his commitment to the heterogeneity of the good—specifically, the distinction between two kinds of good for human beings—and the relationship of priority or conditionality between them. The supreme good (*bonum supremum*) is human morality, virtue or goodness of will: the conformity of the human will to the

---

3 For a discussion of Kant's concept of the highest good in different works, including all three *Critiques* and the *Opus postumum*, see Guyer (2005, 277–313).

moral law. Distinct in kind from this is the natural good, well-being or happiness, which is also good (and intrinsically good, not merely good as a means to something else), but only on the condition that it is related to morality in the right way. This relation is not always conceived in the same way. Happiness is *not* a good at all, but even something evil, when it consists in, or is achieved by means of, something contrary to morality. Happiness is also not good except on the condition that the happy being has made itself worthy of that happiness through morally good conduct or a morally good will. This seems to be the meaning of Kant's famous claim that "a rational impartial spectator can never take satisfaction even in the sight of the uninterrupted welfare of a being, if it is adorned with no trait of a pure and good will; and so the good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of the worthiness to be happy" (*GMM* 4:393.19–24). Happiness proportional to worthiness thus constitutes a second kind of good, the conditioned component of the entire highest good. Consequently, the highest good, in the sense of the *complete* good (*bonum consummatum*), consists in morality or good will, combined with a happiness that is proportionate to goodness of will.

What remains unclear, however, is whether this combination of morality and happiness is meant to refer to the highest good of a single person (the moral agent to whom the argument is addressed), or the highest good of an entire world. The former would apply to *you* if your happiness were proportionate to your worthiness, while the latter would be found only in an entire world in which *everyone* enjoys happiness in proportion to individual worthiness. Sometimes Kant undoubtedly sees the highest good as the goodness of an entire world: a "moral world" (*CPR* A 808/B 836), "the highest good of a possible world" (*CprR* 5:110.38), the "highest best world" (*höchsten Weltbesten*) (*CPJ* 5:451.7), or "the world a moral being would create" (*Rel.* 6:5.28–31). But in Kant's treatments of the history of ethics, the concept of a highest good or *summum bonum* is more often understood as an individual human ideal: the kind of person you should strive to be (*Lect. Moral Phil. Collins* 27/1:247.15–252.5, *Lect. Met. Morals Vigilantius* 27/2.1:482.26–483.28, *Lect. Moral Phil. Mrongovius II* 29/1.1:599.23–600.28). Kant invokes the ancient conception of the highest good as an ideal life in arguing for the heterogeneity of the good and the conditional relation of the moral to the natural good (*CprR* 5:110.31–113.12). The highest good is "*the human being* (each rational being in the world) *under moral laws*" (*CPJ* 5:448.32–3). There is no doubt that in the moral argument too Kant often presents the highest good to us in this way, as an idea to which we should strive to make our individual lives correspond. Each of us is to ask: *What ought I to do?*—and then also: *For what may I hope, if I do as I ought?* (*CPR* A 808–9/B 836–7). In Kant's statements of the moral argument for God's existence, the highest good is sometimes seen as something each of us indi-

vidually should make our end, but also at times as an object of collective pursuit by the human species as a moral community (*Rel.* 6:97.17–98.8, *Anthropology* 7:332.13–333.10).

One thing that is quite clear, however, is that the highest good is not to be thought of as an end in addition to other moral ends we set. The duty to set the highest good as an end "does not increase the number of morality's duties but rather provides these with a special point of reference for the unification of all ends" (*Rel.* 6:5.21–5). We can make the highest good an end because we can promote our own moral virtue, and also that of others when this coincides with their own ends; we can also act in certain ways that tend to make happiness proportionate to worthiness, as by refusing to seek happiness (whether our own or that of others) by immoral means. But we have no duty to promote the moral perfection of others as such, and our only duty regarding the happiness of others is to make their permissible happiness always our end—never anyone's unhappiness an end for its own sake (*MM* 6:385.30–388.30). So it is *never* our business to *deprive* ourselves—still less anyone else—of some happiness just because we might think they are unworthy of it. These limits on the ways in which we can pursue the highest good tend, in Kant's view, to reinforce the thought that the possibility of this end depends on there being an intentionally established causal relationship *in the world* between happiness and worthiness—a relation that could exist only through the agency of a wise and good Deity.

The question remains, however, why it is our duty to make the highest good an end. Why, that is, should we think of the totality of our moral ends as united in this particular way? Each of the three *Critiques* gives a different answer to that question, just as each also gives at least a slightly different answer to the question what doxastic state is required by our setting the highest good as an end. It is now time to explore those differences.

3 The Moral Argument in *Critique of Pure Reason*

In 1781 Kant had not yet formulated his mature moral philosophy as we find it in the *Groundwork* and later. So his presentation of the moral argument for God, immortality and a moral world differs significantly from later presentations. Kant's 1781 position already includes several theses we find in his later ethics as well. Specifically, Kant treats the moral law as a *law of freedom*, determining *what ought* to happen, as distinct from laws of nature, that determine what does happen (*CPR* A 802/B 830, *CPR* A 806/B 834; see also *GMM* 4:463.4–33); the moral law commands *absolutely* (or as he will later say, *categorically*), not hypothetically, or conditionally on empirical ends (*CPR* A 807/B 835, see also *GMM* 4:414.12–420.11); morality is thus

different from prudence or pragmatic reason, which tells us what we must do to be happy (*CPR* A 805/B 834, see also *GMM* 4:415.28–416.6); moral conduct is conduct through which we become *worthy* of happiness (*CPR* A 806/B 834, *CPR* A 808–9/B 836–7, see also *GMM* 4:393.5–24). But Kant's views about the moral incentive in 1781 differ from his later views. In the *Groundwork* and later, Kant famously takes the position that pure practical reason, duty or the moral law all by itself constitutes a sufficient rational incentive for moral action (*GMM* 4:397.1–399.2, *CprR* 5:20.12–25.10, *CprR* 5:30.36–31.34). In the "Canon", however, Kant's position is different. He holds that the moral incentive must satisfy the whole of our rational nature, not merely the *a priori* part. Consequently, it must consist both in making ourselves worthy of happiness and also in the *hope* that we will then enjoy the happiness of which we are worthy (*CPR* A 805/B 833). And this hope requires acceptance of God and a future moral world, through which happiness is proportioned to worthiness:

> Thus without a God and a world that is not now visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization, because they would not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined *a priori* and necessarily through the very same pure reason. (*CPR* A 813/B 841)

Henry Allison (2011) has noted this difference between the "Canon" and Kant's later ethics. He thinks Kant abandoned the position of the "Canon" because he saw it to be both eudaimonistic and heteronomous (Allison 2011, 55–6). Clearly his position in the "Canon" differs from the one adopted later, but it seems to me not quite right to call it eudaimonistic. In the "Canon" Kant distinguishes moral from prudential reason, and the end of morality from that of happiness. He includes happiness within that end, but only conditionally. The inclusion of hope for happiness within the moral incentive would make the ethics of the "Canon" heteronomous according to Kant's later conception of autonomy, but Kant does not yet relate morality to the concept of autonomy, so Allison's other charge is harder to evaluate. If we are autonomous when we are motivated by the fulfillment of our whole end as rational beings, then the "Canon's" conception of the moral incentive counts as autonomous as well as avoiding eudaimonism.

There is even something attractive, compared to Kant's later views, about the idea that the moral incentive must encompass the whole ends of our rational nature, and not leave the hope for satisfaction of our finite needs unaddressed. If I were to conjecture Kant's reasons for abandoning the position of the "Canon", it would be that there seems something unstable, or insufficiently motivated, about the view that we might approve and admire moral conduct without having

a sufficient incentive to resolve on and realize it. Why should we approve and admire conduct we have no incentive to practice?

In the "Canon", however, Kant seems to think of the moral argument for belief in God and a moral world as the proper resolution to this problem. If I have moral belief or faith, then I do have a sufficient incentive to realize the moral conduct that the moral law gives me reason to approve and admire. It follows that the third of Kant's three famous questions: "What may I hope?" has a far more momentous significance in the "Canon" than it does in Kant's later philosophy. For it is only the hope for the happiness of which I make myself worthy, grounded on moral resolve to make myself worthy of it, that provides me with a sufficient incentive for moral conduct. We find this same position stated also in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (which may date from 1783; this passage even gives some grounds for accepting that date): "The possibility of the concept of God is supported by morality, since otherwise morality would have no incentives" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:998.35–6). Kant even argues there that we can avoid eudaimonism only by making our assent to the existence of God a form of faith rather than knowledge, since only a belief morally motivated places the resolve to be worthy of happiness ahead of the wish for happiness. If the human being knew there is a God, he "would represent God as himself a rewarder or avenger; this image would force itself involuntarily on his soul, and his hope for reward and fear of punishment would take the place of moral motives; the human being *would be virtuous from sensible impulses*" (*Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1084.5–10).

4 The Moral Argument in *Critique of Practical Reason*

In Kant's second and third *Critiques*, our incentive for obeying the moral law is no longer made to depend on the moral argument for God's existence. The realization of the highest good for each of us is no longer located in a future life, but seen as part of a natural order governed by divine providence. In the second *Critique*, immortality of the soul is seen as a postulate of practical reason necessary for complete actualization only of the first or supreme component of the highest good (morality or virtue) (*CprR* 5:122.1–124.3). We can conceive of complete realization of this component only through endless progress toward holiness, represented as taking place in a future life. The moral argument for God's existence is presented essentially in terms of the ideas we have already expounded in §1 of this essay. It may be summarized as follows:

1. I have an obligation to will the highest good as an end. (In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, this follows from the rational principle of seeking unconditioned totality in our concept of the object of pure practical reason; see *CprR* 5:108.6–12).
2. To will something as an end presupposes that it is possible—that I have the means to it (*GMM* 4:394.13–31, *GMM* 4:437.5–20).
3. Therefore, someone who wills the highest good as an end must assent to the conditions of its possibility (*CprR* 5:113.13–114.9, *CprR* 5:119.1–23).
4. The highest good is possible only if there is a God who apportions happiness to worthiness.
5. Therefore, if I am to will the highest good as an end, I am required by reason assent to the existence of God.

The *Critique of Practical Reason* calls the existence of God a "postulate of pure practical reason." This may be understood as follows:

In Kant's logic, practical propositions—those representing some action as possible according to reason, are divided into "problems" and "postulates." A *problem* (*Aufgabe, problema*) is a demonstrable proposition expressing an action whose manner of execution is not immediately certain (*Logic* 9:112.6–8). In the "Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the cosmological ideas (the beginning of the world, its limit in space, simple substance, free causality, necessary existence) are given as problems (*aufgegeben*) by pure reason (*CPR* A 498/B 526, see also *CPR* A 335/B 392). That is, reason demands that we seek their objects; how we do so is not immediately certain, nor is it immediately certain whether we can perform the action in question; but it is demonstrable how we search for these objects, namely through regulative (not constitutive) principles of reason (*CPR* A 508–15/B 536–43; see also *CPR* A 624–6/B 670–2).

A *postulate*, by contrast, is an immediately certain and indemonstrable proposition determining a possible action whose manner of execution is immediately certain (*Logic* 9:112.3–5). The action in question in the "Dialectic" of the second *Critique* is that of willing the highest good as an end. It is immediately certain that, and how, we may do this—namely, by obeying the moral law and willing the other ends (duties of virtue) it commands us to will. But it is indemonstrable that this end is possible, since it depends on the existence of God. The postulate of pure practical reason thus represents to us as possible the condition for performing the action of willing the highest good as an end. And because this action is morally required, the postulate becomes immediately certain for practical reason, even if it remains indemonstrable and uncertain for theoretical reason. It remains unclear whether the immediacy and indemonstrability is supposed to attach also to the connection between willing the highest good as an end and the postu-

lation of the condition of the possibility of rationally willing this; for it does not seem immediately certain or in no need of demonstration that this condition is God's existence. On the contrary, it looks like Kant presents an *argument* that the highest good is possible *in the world* only on the condition that there exists a highest *original* good, having the knowledge, power and will to make it possible (*CprR* 5:124.4–125.30).

5 The Moral Argument in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

In the third *Critique*, the moral argument seems again to be essentially the same as that in the second *Critique*—the five-step argument summarized above. But it is given a different and larger context, namely, the attempt to systematize all teleology—that of nature and that of reason or morality—in the concept of an ultimate end (*letzter Zweck*) for the entire world. The strategy for unifying ends seems to be quite close to that used by Aristotle at the very beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1094a–b). All ends are subordinated to others by subordinating the actions, arts or teleological systems they involve to others, resulting in a single ultimate end for all. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the ends of all human striving are systematized under *eudaimonia* (especially that of a society or *polis*). Kant argues that the end under which we may systematize all the ends of nature is the human being, because of all natural beings, the human being is the only one capable of consciously willing ends and organizing ends into a system. This makes the human being the ultimate end of nature (*CPJ* 5:426.15–431.34).

Kant then asks what it is about the human being that could make it such an end? He rejects the suggestion that it is human *happiness* that constitutes such an end. Nature has not arranged things so that happiness is even among nature's ends, much less its ultimate one. The human pursuit of happiness, which never reaches complete success, is rather nature's means for developing human capacities—collectively and in history. Human beings constitute the ultimate end of nature, therefore, only through the culture (*Kultur*) through which they develop and exercise these capacities according to reason. It is the *vocation* (*Bestimmung*) of human beings to make themselves into the ultimate end of nature through this culture (*CPJ* 5:431.6–7). Human culture takes two basic forms. The first is the culture of *skill*, through which human beings develop the capacity to pursue ends at their discretion; the second is the culture of *discipline*, through which human beings constrain themselves to will ends determined by reason (*CPJ* 5:431.12–434.3). The former culture is clearly subordinated to the latter. Therefore, the human being

becomes the ultimate end of nature only through the culture of discipline. The highest ends of reason are those of morality, and the highest of these is their unconditioned sum-total, the highest good in the world (*Weltbeste*) (*CPJ* 5:451.7), which Kant now renames as "the human being under moral laws" (*CPJ* 5:445.17–18). This includes human beings who do not act in accordance with moral laws, but enjoy only a happiness proportional to the morality of their conduct (*CPJ* 5:448.29–450.3). The highest good is the only end that may be regarded as a *final end* (*Endzweck*)— that end which needs no other end as a condition of its possibility (*CPJ* 5:434.7–8). It is therefore only through the human beings willing of the highest good that humanity can fulfill its vocation of being not only the ultimate end of nature, but also giving the whole of creation a final end (*CPJ* 5:435.4–30, *CPJ* 5:437.1, 19, *CPJ* 5:442.13–443.13).

In the third *Critique*, therefore, Kant grounds our duty to will the highest good in the human vocation to be the ultimate end of nature and to give nature a final end. The moral argument is further developed there through what Kant calls an "ethicotheology"—a conception of God as the being whose volition enables us to understand nature and our own place in it through the concept of a teleological system (*CPJ* §86). We are to look to God as our "overlord" who commands us to fulfill our vocation in relation to nature, and our judge under moral laws for the manner in which we conduct ourselves in relation to the teleological system of nature (*CPJ* 5:446.10–37). Our need to accept (*annehmen*) a moral cause and ruler of the world is justified by our need to think of our vocation through feelings of *thankfulness* (for nature's purposive harmony), *obedience* (to the moral law of reason) and *humiliation* (self-reproach at our moral failings and deserved *chastisement* when we fall short of our vocation of being the ultimate end of nature and giving it a final end) (*CPJ* 5:446.10–447.13).

Kant's thesis that only the human being can be the ultimate end of nature, and give the whole of creation a final end, is the very opposite of the truly horrid idea that nature exists only in order that human beings may impose their arbitrary will upon it. On the contrary, it is the vocation—the duty, the responsibility—of human beings to behave toward nature in such a way as to preserve and promote that harmonious system of ends that already exists in nature. In order to do this, we must curb our propensity to make our own inclinations and happiness our chief object of concern, and instead constrain our wills to make ourselves into that by which nature itself constitutes a harmonious system. It is thus a basic duty to ourselves, as the ultimate end of nature, to preserve the beauty of nature, and not to uproot our natural disposition to appreciate and promote it (*MM* 6:443.1–25).

We may judge by this standard how well people have done at fulfilling their vocation on earth when they choose to remain ignorant of, or in outright denial of, the ways in which their arbitrary ends and immediate interests disrupt the nat-

ural environment, drive other species to extinction, perhaps even undermine the quality of life and even the long term survival of the human species, and thereby (in Kant's view) the very possibility of any purpose and meaning in the entire cosmos.

6 The Kind of Assent to God's Existence Claimed for the Moral Argument

In all three *Critiques*, Kant immediately appends to his statement of the moral argument a set of reflections on the kind of *assent* (or holding-for-true, *Fürwahrhalten*) it justifies (*CPR* A 820–32/B 848–59, *CprR* 5:142.1–146.12, *CPJ* §§90–1, *CPJ* 5:461.11–476.15). Assent is for Kant the basic affirmative propositional attitude (as it is for Descartes and Locke). Assent can be mere *persuasion* (*Überredung*), having subjective causes that explain the subject's assent but no rational grounds, or it can be *conviction* (*Überzeugung*), based on genuine grounds of some kind (*CPR* A 820–1/B 848–9, *CPJ* 5:461.14–22). Because they involve some kind of rational justification, convictions license *assertion* (to others) of that to which we assent, but mere persuasion does not.[4]

Conviction comes in three grades or degrees, depending on the kind and strength of the rational grounds for the assent. Knowledge (*Wissen*) is assent based on grounds sufficient to justify the assent and that are objective, both in the sense that they are the kinds of grounds that are valid universally for all subjects and in the sense that they relate to the objects the judgment is about (*CPR* A 822/B 850). These grounds may be either a priori proof or empirical grounds, including arguments from analogy (*CPJ* 5:463.15–465.23). Belief (*Glaube*) is based on grounds that are subjective in the sense that they concern the practical ends of the subject. Above we saw how a physician's need to treat a patient might lead her to assent to a certain diagnosis; assent based in this way on a discretionary end Kant calls *pragmatic belief* (*CPR* A 824–5/B 852–3). Kant also recognizes what he calls *doctrinal belief*, based on theoretical aims (*CPR* A 825/B 853); he thinks that the existence of God can be assented to in this way insofar as the idea of God is used regulatively for theoretical purposes (*CPR* A 826/B 854). *Moral belief* in God is the kind of assent produced by the moral argument. The lowest degree of conviction is opinion (*Meinung*) (*CPR* A 822/B 850, *CPJ* 5:465.24–466.11). The grounds for it are insufficient subjectively as well as objectively: that is, the subject

---

4 A fuller account of this distinction, and the distinctions drawn in the next few paragraphs, can be found in Chignell (2007).

is aware that they do not fully justify the assent, but opinion is still a form of conviction in cases where it can be based on a rule of evidence that might serve to justify it. Hypotheses may be asserted in the form of opinions if they meet this condition (*CPJ* 5:466.12–25). From this point onward, I am going to follow Chignell and use the term 'Belief' (capitalized) to refer to the kind of practical assent for which Kant uses the German word *Glaube.*

'Belief' (capitalized) is not in all respects what we normally think of as belief, or what *Glaube* means in ordinary German. Normally, when we say we believe something, we mean that it is part of the background on which we proceed in both acting and inquiring. By this I mean that we do not believe things only for certain purposes or in certain respects, but assent to what is believed by default, so to speak; we take for granted what we believe while deliberating about what to do or about what else we should assent to, for this or that purpose. Beliefs themselves lose this status only when we call them into question, and then it becomes problematic whether we any longer truly believe.

Kantian Beliefs, however, are always held in certain respects, or for certain purposes. The doctor might say: "For the purpose of treating this patient, I proceed by assenting such-and-such diagnosis." If asked whether she believes (in the ordinary sense) that the patient has that disease, she might well say: "I do not know what disease the patient has, and I do not honestly have a *belief* about that. If I were a detached observer, with no interest in treating the patient, I would simply suspend judgment about what the ailment is. It is solely on pragmatic grounds, and solely for the purpose of treating the patient, that I assent to the diagnosis of consumption." Doctrinal Beliefs, analogously, are held only for the purposes of inquiry. Moral Belief is held "in a practical respect" or "for practical purposes" (*CprR* 5:146.5, 7). We assent to the existence of God, that is, in order to resolve the rational tension between our willing the highest good as an end and our ignorance regarding the possibility of this end. Kant sometimes refers to this as "a need of reason" (*CprR* 5:142.1–143.31). Kant says that the moral argument does not justify saying "*It is* certain that there is a God," but only that "*I am* morally certain" (*CPR* A 829/B 857). The statement is about my practical situation as much as it is about the matter to which I assent.

Another term Kant often uses to express this kind of assent is 'assume' or 'accept' (*annehmen*) (*CPR* A 811/B 839; *CprR* 5:120.11, 20; *CprR* 5:121.11; *CPJ* 5:453.5; *CPJ* 5:471.8; *CPJ* 5:480.23). We can assume or accept, for certain purposes even what we clearly do not believe: for instance, we can assume or accept something as a premise at the beginning of an indirect proof that the negation of this premise is true. Of course Kant does not think we positively *disbelieve* the conclusion of the moral argument, as we disbelieve what is accepted in this case for a specific purpose.

If what religious people want from their faith is the sort of default assent that provides a comforting certainty, protecting them from the anxiety and torment of religious doubt, making them feel safe and secure in a terrifyingly absurd world, then Kant's moral arguments cannot give them what they want. At times, Kant seems to be trying to convince his audience (perhaps also himself) that the moral arguments do provide this (*CPR* A 828–9/B 856–7, see also *Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1010.34–1012.29, *Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1082.1–1084.10, *Lect. Rat. Theol. Pölitz* 28/2.2:1125.33–1126.36). But at other times Kant regards what the moral arguments produce is a practically motivated and emotionally charged acceptance that is less than certain, and also compatible with serious doubt (see *CPJ* 5:452.8–453.5). He insists that moral faith in God is incompatible with *unbelief* (*Unglaube*), but also that it is not to be confused with credulity (*Leichtgläubigkeit*); the lack of theoretical grounds for its assent makes it quite compatible with a "doubting faith" (*Zweifelglaube*) (*CPJ* 5:472.2–473.2). Some religious people recognize faith as a special kind of acceptance related in complex ways to both belief and doubt (see Alston 1996). Something along these lines would make the faith justified by the moral arguments into what some liberal religious believers support when they say: "The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty" (Lamott 2005, 256–7).

Kantian belief is in tension with, but it is also consistent with, the evidentialist position maintained by William Kingdon Clifford (1999, 77) when he declared: "It is wrong always, everywhere and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence". Other philosophers well known to Kant—Locke and especially Mendelssohn, had already advocated evidentialism. Since practical Belief is not belief in the sense meant in Clifford's evidentialist principle, there is no contradiction between that principle and Kantian practical Belief. Clifford himself insists that we should assent to some propositions for which evidence is insufficient—for example, to hypotheses for which we are seeking sufficient evidence. Clifford does not discuss Kantian moral Belief, but there is no reason to think he is committed to disapprove of it. Kantian Belief and evidentialism can be seen to be consistent once we realize they have the same common enemy: *comfortable complacency.* Evidentialism holds that it is wrong to comfort ourselves with lies and illusions; Kantian Belief seeks to deprive us of the comfort of despair, when we are prepared to abandon our end so as to release ourselves from the pain and effort of striving and caring. Both evidentialism and Kantian Belief are widely misunderstood and both are rejected by many people for bad (even morally corrupt) reasons. The space of that tension, between Kantian Belief and evidentialism, is precisely that uncomfortable place where any sober, serious agent should seek to reside.

References

Allison, Henry, *Kant's* Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: *A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Alston, William, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," in *Freedom and Rationality*, ed. by Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 3–27.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999, 2nd ed.).

Beiser, Frederick C., *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1987).

Chignell, Andrew, "Belief in Kant," *Philosophical Review* 116.3 (2007), 323–60.

Clifford, William Kingdon, *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999).

Guyer, Paul, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Lamott, Anne, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

Reinhold, Karl Leonhard (1786), *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, ed. by Raymund Schmidt (Leipzig: Reclam, 1923).

Bibliography

1 Primary Historical Sources: Kant's Writings

1.1 Original Edition of Kant's Works

Kant, Immanuel, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie-Ausgabe, ed. by the Royal Prussian (later German, then Berlin-Brandenburg) Academy of Sciences, 29 vols. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1902–).

1.2 Translations of Kant's Works

Unless otherwise noted, translations of Kant's works in this volume are from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.* But citations give an abbreviated English title of the relevant work, rather than referring to the titles of the volumes of the *Cambridge Edition.* The key to abbreviations found at the beginning of this volume also indicates the title and page numbers of the relevant *Cambridge Edition* volume for each work cited in translation.

The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992–).

Anthropology, History, and Education, ed. by Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden, trans. by Mary Gregor, Paul Guyer, Robert B. Louden, Holly Wilson, Allen W. Wood, Günter Zöller, and Arnulf Zweig, in *ibid.*, 2007.
Critique of Pure Reason, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, in *ibid.*, 1997.
Critique of the Power of Judgment, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, in *ibid.*, 2000.
Lectures on Ethics, ed. by Peter Heath and Jerome B. Schneewind, trans. by Peter Heath, in *ibid.*, 1997.
Lectures on Metaphysics, ed. and trans. by Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon, in *ibid.*, 1997.
Natural Science, ed. by Eric Watkins, trans. by Lewis White Beck, Jeffery Edwards, Olaf Reinhardt, Martin Schönfeld, and Eric Watkins, in *ibid.*, 2012.
Notes and Fragments, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer, and Frederick Rauscher, in *ibid.*, 2005.
Opus postumum, ed. by Eckart Förster, trans. by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen, in *ibid.*, 1993.
Practical Philosophy, ed. and trans. by Mary Gregor, introd. by Allen W. Wood, in *ibid.*, 1996.
Religion and Rational Theology, ed. by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, in *ibid.*, 1996.
Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770, ed. and trans. by David Walford, in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote, in *ibid.*, 1992.
Theoretical Philosophy after 1781, ed. by Henry E. Allison and Peter Heath, trans. by Henry E. Allison, Michael Friedman, Gary Hatfield, and Peter Heath, in *ibid.*, 2002.

Danzig Rational Theology According to Baumbach, in *Preparation for Natural Theology*, ed. and trans. by Courtney D. Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 131–218.

2 Primary Historical and Secondary Sources

Abaci, Uygar, "Kant's Only Possible Argument and Chignell's Real Harmony," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 1–25.

Abaci, Uygar, "The Coextensiveness Thesis and Kant's Modal Agnosticism in the 'Postulates'," *European Journal of Philosophy* 24.1 (2016), 129–58.

Abaci, Uygar, "Kant, the Actualist Principle, and the Fate of the Only Possible Proof," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55.2 (2017), 261–91.

Abaci, Uygar, *Kant's Revolutionary Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Adams, Robert Merrihew, "God, Possibility, and Kant," *Faith and Philosophy* 17.4 (2000), 425–40.

Adickes, Erich, *Kant als Naturforscher* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1925), vol. 2.

Al-Azm, Sadik, J. *The Origins of Kant's Arguments in the Antinomies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

Allison, Henry, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Allison, Henry, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

Allison, Henry, *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Alston, William, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," in *Freedom and Rationality*, ed. by Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 3–27.

Ameriks, Karl, *Kant's Elliptical Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Anderson-Gold, Sharon, *Unnecessary Evil: History and Moral Progress in the Philosophy of Immanuel Kant* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

Anselm (1078), "Proslogion," in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 75–114.

Anselm of Canterbury, *St. Anselms Proslogion (1078),* ed. by Max Charlesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Aquinas, St. Thomas (1485), *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), vol. 1.

Aquinas, Thomas (1485), *Summa Theologiae*, 61 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), vol. 2.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999, 2nd ed.).

Aufderheide, Joachim/ Bader, Ralf M., eds., *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Augustine of Hippo, St. (between 397–400), *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. by Joseph Green Pilkington (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1876).

Bader, Ralf, "Kant's Theory of the Highest Good," in *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, ed. by Joachim Aufderheide and Ralf M. Bader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 183–213.

Barnes, Jonathan, *The Ontological Argument* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972).

Bauch, Bruno, *Immanuel Kant* (Berlin/ Leipzig: Göschen, 1917).

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb (1739/⁴1757), *Metaphysics: A Critical Translation with Kant's Elucidations, Selected Notes and Related Materials*, ed. and trans. by Courtney Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb, *Metaphysica* (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1739/1757, 4th ed.).

Beck, Lewis White, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

Beiser, Frederick C., *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1987).

Bennett, Jonathan F., *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

Biedermann, Georg/ Lange, Erhard, "Die Religionskritik der deutschen Klassik: Eine wesentliche Quelle des wissenschaftlichen Atheismus," in *Philosophie und Religion: Beiträge zur Religionskritik der deutschen Klassik*, ed. by Erhard Lange (Weimar: Böhlau, 1981), 7–60.

Boehm, Omri, "Kant's Regulative Spinozism," *Kant-Studien* 103 (2012), 312–17.

Boehm, Omri, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Buhr, Manfred, *Vernunft—Mensch—Geschichte: Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der klassischen bürgerlichen Philosophie* (Berlin: Akademie, 1977).

Bund, Hugo, *Kant als Philosoph des Katholizismus* (Berlin: Hause, 1913).

Butler, Joseph, "Sermon XI," in *The Works of Bishop Butler*, ed. by David White (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 110–18.

Byrne, Peter, *Kant on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

Caterus, Johannes (1641), "First Set of Objections," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vol. 2, 66–73.

Chance, Brian/ Pasternack, Lawrence, "Rational Faith and the Pantheism Controversy: Kant's "Orientation" Essay and the Evolution of his Moral Argument," in *Essays on Kant and his German Contemporaries*, ed. by Daniel Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 195–214.

Chignell, Andrew, "Belief in Kant," *Philosophical Review* 116.3 (2007), 323–60.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91.2 (2009), 157–92.

Chignell, Andrew, "The Devil, the Virgin, and the Envoy: Symbols of Moral Struggle in *Religion* II.2," in *Klassiker Auslegen: Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, ed. by Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 111–30.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant, Real Possibility and the Threat of Spinoza," *Mind* 121.483 (2012), 635–75.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant and the 'Monstrous' Ground of Possibility: A Reply to Abaci and Yong," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 53–69.

Chignell, Andrew, "Rational Hope, Possibility, and Divine Action," in *Kant's* Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. A Critical Guide, ed. by Gordon Michaelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 98–117.

Chignell, Andrew, "Kant's Modal Metaphysics, by Nicholas Stang," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 16 (2016), https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/kants-modal-metaphysics/, last access September 1, 2023.

Chignell, Andrew, "Knowledge, Anxiety, Hope: How Kant's First and Third Questions Relate," in *The Court of Reason: Proceedings of the 13th International Kant Congress*, ed. by Beatrix Himmelmann and Camilla Serck-Hanssen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 127–50.

Chignell, Andrew/ Pereboom, Derk, "Natural Theology and Natural Religion," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/natural-theology/ (2015), last access October 6, 2016.

Clark, Kelly James, "Proofs of God's Existence," *The Journal of Religion* 69.1 (1989), 59–84.

Clifford, William Kingdon, *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999).

Coles Peter, "Kant, Immanuel," in *The Routledge Companion to the New Cosmology*, ed. by Peter Coles (London/ New York: Routledge, 2004, 2nd ed.), 240–1.

Craig, William, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

Cramer, Wolfgang, *Gottesbeweise und ihre Kritik. Prüfung ihrer Beweiskraft* (Göttingen: Klostermann, 1967, 2010, 2nd ed.).

Crusius, Christian August, *Dissertatio de Usu et Limitibus Principii Rationis Determinantis Vulgo Sufficientis* (Leipzig: Officina Langenhemiana, 1743).

Crusius, Christian August (1766), "Entwurf der Nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten [Entwurf]," in *Die philosophischen Hauptwerke*, ed. by Giorgio Tonelli (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), vol. 2.

Dell'Oro, Regina, *From Existence to Ideal. Continuity and Development in Kant's Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

Derham, William, *Physico-Theology or a Demonstration of the Being and of the Attributes of God, from his Works of Creation: Being the Substance of Sixteen Sermons Preached in St. Mary-le-Bow-Church* (London: J. Innys, 1713).

Descartes, René (1641), "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vol. 2, 1–62.

Descartes, René, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stotthoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–91).

Despland, Michel, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973).

di Giovanni, George, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

DiCenso, James, *Kant, Religion, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

DiCenso, James, *Kant's* Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: *A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Dörflinger, Bernd, "Kant über das Defizit der Physikotheologie und die Notwendigkeit einer Ethikotheologie," in *Die Gottesfrage in der Philosophie Kants*, ed. by Norbert Fischer and Maximilian Forschner (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 71–84.

Eberhard, Johann August (1781), *Preparation for Natural Theology*, ed. by Courtney D. Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

Engels, Friedrich, *Dialectics of Nature (Marxist Library, Works of Marxism-Leninism Volume XXVII)*, trans. by Clemens Palme Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1940).

Engert, Josef, "Kant und seine Kritik der Gottesbeweise," *Pharus* 16.10 (1925), 593–610.

England, Frederick Ernest, *Kant's Conception of God* (New York: Dial Press, 1930).

Engstrom, Stephen, "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (1992), 747–80.

Everitt, Nicholas, *The Non-Existence of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

Faust, Jennifer, "Can Religious Arguments 'Persuade'?," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 63.1/3 (2008), 71–86.

Fischer, Kuno, *Immanuel Kant und seine Lehre* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1898), vol. 1.

Fisher, Mark/ Watkins, Eric, "Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility: From *The Only Possible Argument* to the *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Review of Metaphysics* 52.2 (1998), 369–95.

Forgie, William, "The Alleged Dependency of the Cosmological Argument on the Ontological Argument," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003), 364–70.

Forgie, Wiliam, "Gassendi and Kant on Existence," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 45.4 (2007), 511–23.

Förster, Eckart, "Die Wandlungen in Kants Gotteslehre," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 52.3 (1998), 341–62.

Förster, Eckart, *Kant's Final Synthesis. An Essay on the* Opus postumum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Fugate, Courtney D., "The Highest Good and Kant's Proof(s) of God's Existence," *History of Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (2014), 137–58.

Fugate, Courtney D., *The Teleology of Reason* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

Gale, Richard/ Pruss, Alexander, "A New Cosmological Argument," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999), 461–76.

Garve, Christian (1783), "Rezension von Immanuel Kants Critique der reinen Vernunft," reprinted in *Immanuel Kant.* Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können, ed. by Rudolf Malter (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1989), 219–46.

Gaunilo (1078), "Gaunilo's Reply on Behalf of the Fool," in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 105–14.

Geisler, Ralf, *Kants moralischer Gottesbeweis im protestantischen Positivismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 1992).

Ginsborg, Hannah, "Oughts Without Intentions," in *Kant's Theory of Biology,* ed. by Ina Goy and Eric Watkins, (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 259–74.

Göcke, Benedikt Paul, *The Panentheism of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832): From Transcendental Philosophy to Metaphysics* (Boston: Peter Lang, 2018).

Gödel, Kurt (c. 1941), "Unpublished Essays and Lectures," in *Collected Works*, ed. by Solomon Feferman, John W. Dawson Jr., Stephen C. Kleene, Gregory H. Moore, Robert M. Solovay, and Jean van Heijenoort, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vol. 3.

Goodman, Lenn, *God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Goy, Ina, "Kant's Theory of Biology and the Argument from Design," in *Kant's Theory of Biology*, ed. by Ina Goy and Eric Watkins (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 203–20.

Goy, Ina, *Kants Theorie der Biologie* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2017).

Goy, Ina, "Kant on Nonhuman Animals and God," in *Kant and Animals*, ed. by Lucy Allais and John Callanan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 89–104.

Greer, Michelle, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Gulyga, Arsenij, *Immanuel Kant*, trans. into German from a Russian edition (Moscow 1977) by Sigrun Bielfeldt (Frankfurt/ Main: Insel, 1981).

Guyer, Paul, "The Unity of Reason: Pure Reason as Practical Reason in Kant's Early Conception of the Transcendental Dialectic," *Monist* 72 (1989), 139–67. Reprinted in Guyer 2000, 60–95.

Guyer, Paul, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Guyer, Paul, "From Nature to Morality: Kant's New Argument in the 'Critique of Teleological Judgment'," in *Architektonik und System in der Philosophie Kants*, ed. by Hans-Friedrich Fulda and Jürgen Stolzenberg (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), 375–404. Reprinted in Guyer 2005, 314–42.

Guyer, Paul, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Guyer, Paul, "Kantian Communities: The Realm of Ends, the Ethical Community, and the Highest Good," in *Kant and the Concept of Community*, ed. by Charlton Payne and Lucas Thorpe (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 88–120. Reprinted in Guyer 2016a, 275–302.

Guyer, Paul, "Freedom, Happiness, and Nature: Kant's Moral Teleology (*CPJ* §§83–4, 86–7)," in *Kant's Theory of Biology*, ed. by Ina Goy and Eric Watkins (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 221–37.

Guyer, Paul, *Kant* (London: Routledge, 2014, 2nd ed.).

Guyer, Paul, "Kant, Mendelssohn, and Immortality," in *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Thomas Höwing (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2016), 157–80.

Guyer, Paul, *Virtues of Freedom: Selected Essays on Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016a).

Heine, Heinrich, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, ed. by Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Heine, Heinrich (1835), "Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland," in *Sämtliche Werke in vier Bänden*, ed. by Otto Lachman, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Reclam, 1921), vol. 3, 480–99.

Henrich, Dieter, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis: Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960).

Henrich, Dieter, *Aesthetic Judgement and the Moral Image of the World: Studies in Kant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Hick, John Harwood, "Ontological Argument for the Existence of God," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Donald M. Borchert, 10 vols. (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 1967, 2006, 2nd ed.), vol. 7, 15–19.

Hoffer, Noam, "The Relation Between God and the World in the Pre-critical Kant: Was Kant a Spinozist?," *Kantian Review* 21.2 (2016), 185–210.

Hoffer, Noam, "The Dialectical Illusion in Kant's Only Possible Argument for the Existence of God," *Kantian Review* 25.3 (2020), 339–63.

Holley, David M., "Should Believers Be Interested in Arguments for God's Existence?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20.4 (1986), 383–9.

Hume, David (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. by Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Huxford, George, *Kant and Theodicy: A Search for an Answer to the Problem of Evil* (Landham, MD: Lexington, 2020).

Insole, Christopher, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism and Newton's Divine Sensorium," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72 (2011), 413–26.

Insole, Christopher, *Kant and the Creation of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Jacquette, Dale, "Newton's Metaphysics of Space as God's Emanative Effect," *Physics in Perspective* 16.3 (2014), 344–70.

Jay, Christopher, "The Kantian Moral Hazard Argument for Religious Fictionalism," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 75 (2014), 207–32.

Klaus, Georg, "Die Frühschriften Immanuel Kants: Ihre philosophiehistorische und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung," in *Philosophiehistorische Abhandlungen: Kopernikus— D'Alembert—Condillac—Kant*, ed. by Georg Klaus (Berlin: Akademie, 1977), 139–220.

Kleingeld, Pauline, "Kant on 'Good', the Good, and the Duty to Promote the Highest Good," in *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Thomas Höwing (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 33–50.

Knudsen, Harald, *Gottesbeweise im deutschen Idealismus: die modaltheoretische Begründung des Absoluten dargestellt an Kant, Hegel und Weiße* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972).

Koons, Robert, "A New Look at the Cosmological Argument," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997), 193–211.

Kotsuka, Shinichiro, *Die Gottesbeweise in der Philosophie Kants* (Berlin: Diss., 1931).

Kravitz, Amit, "Geht die Physikotheologie der Ethikotheologie vorher?," *Kant-Studien* 108.4 (2018), 568–88.

Krishnan, Maya, "Was Kant a Spinozist? The Status of the Exemplification Account of the *Ens Realissimum* in Kant's Critical Theology," (unpublished).

Kühn, Manfred, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Lamott, Anne, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, *Mathematische Schriften*, ed. by Carl Immanuel Gerhardt (Berlin: A. Asher, 1863).

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. by Carl Immanuel Gerhardt, 7 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–90).

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1704), *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

Leibniz, Gottfried, Wilhelm (1714), "The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology," in *Philosophical Essays,* ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 213–25.

Logan, Ian, "Whatever Happened to Kant's Ontological Argument?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74.2 (2007), 346–63.

Malcolm, Norman, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *The Philosophical Review* 69.1 (1960), 41–62.

McCarthy, Vincent A., *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

McFarland, John, *Kant's Concept of Teleology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Morning Hours*, trans. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Last Works*, trans. by Bruce Rosenstock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. by Fritz Bamberger *et. al.*, continued by Alexander Altmann *et. al.*, 24 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1929–).

Menzer, Paul, *Kants Lehre von der Entwicklung in Natur und Geschichte* (Berlin: Reimer, 1911).

Mercier, Brett/ Kramer, Stephanie/ Shariff, Azim, "Belief in God: Why People Believe, and Why They Don't," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 27 (2018), 263–8.

Michalson, Gordon E., *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1979).

Michel, Karl-Heinz, *Immanuel Kant und die Frage der Erkennbarkeit Gottes: eine kritische Untersuchung der "Transzendentalen Ästhetik" der "Kritik der reinen Vernunft" und ihrer theologischen Konsequenz* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1987).

Miller, Eddis N., *Kant's "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason": A Reader's Guide* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

Munitz, Milton K., "Introduction," in *Kant: Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, trans. by William Hastie (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

Newlands, Samuel, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility," *The Philosophical Review* 122.2 (2013), 155–87.

Newton, Isaac (1660), "De Gravitatione," in *Newton. Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Andrew Janiak, trans. by Arnie Hall and Marie Boas Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Newton, Isaac, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. by Andrew Motte, based on the 1726 3rd ed. of *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (London: B. Motte, 1729).

Newton, Isaac, *Opticks, or A Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections, and Colours of Light* (London: William Innys, 1730, 4th ed.).

O'Connor, Timothy, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008).

Oberst, Michael, "The Possibility Proof Is Not What Remains From Kant's *Beweisgrund*," *Kantian Review* 25.2 (2020), 219–42.

Oberst, Michael, "God, Powers, and Possibility in Kant's *Beweisgrund*," (unpublished).

Oppy, Graham, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Oppy, Graham, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Oppy, Graham, ed., *Ontological Arguments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Ostaric, Lara, "Practical Cognition, Reflective Judgment, and the Realism of Kant's Moral *Glaube*," in *Moral Realism or Antirealism in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, ed. by Robinson dos Santos and Elke Elisabeth Schmidt (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2017), 89–115.

Ostaric, Lara, *The* Critique of Judgment *and the Unity of Kant's Critical System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?," *Kant-Studien* 83.2 (1992), 129–48.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "'The Kingdom of God is at Hand!' (Did *Kant* really say *that?*)," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 11.4 (1994), 421–37.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Critical Hermeneutic of Prayer," *The Journal of Religion* 77.4 (1997), 584–604.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kantian Redemption: A Critical Challenge to Christian Views of Faith and Works," *Philosophia Christi* 9.1 (2007), 29–38.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Quasi-Transcendental Argument for a Necessary and Universal Evil Propensity in Human Nature," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46.2 (2008), 261–97.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God—The Ultimate Dependence of Human Destiny on Divine Assistance," *Faith and Philosophy* 26.1 (2009), 3–22.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance," *The Journal of Religion* 90.4 (2010), 530–53.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Could Kant's Jesus Be God?," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52.4 (2012), 421–37.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Prudential Theory of Religion: The Necessity of Historical Faith for Moral Empowerment," *Con-textos Kantianos* 1 (2015a), 57–76.

Palmquist, Stephen R., "What is Kantian *Gesinnung?* On the Priority of Volition over Metaphysics and Psychology in Kant's *Religion*," *Kantian Review* 20.2 (2015b), 235–64.

Palmquist, Stephen R., *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

Palmquist, Stephen R., "Kant's Model for Building the True Church: Transcending 'Might Makes Right' and 'Should Makes Good' through the Idea of a Non-Coercive Theocracy," *Diametros* 54 (2017), 76–94.

Palmquist, Stephen R., *Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason's Light* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019).

Palmquist, Stephen R., *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000; reprinted New York: Routledge, 2019).

Palmquist, Stephen R., "How Political is the Kantian Church?," *Diametros* 17.65 (2020), 95–113.

Palmquist, Stephen R./ Otterman, Steven, "The Implied Standpoint of Kant's *Religion:* An Assessment of Kant's Reply to (and an English Translation of) an Early Book Review of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*," *Kantian Review* 18.1 (2013), 73–97.

Palmquist, Stephen R./ Rudisill, Philip, "Three Perspectives on Abraham's Defense Against Kant's Charge of Immoral Conduct," *The Journal of Religion* 89.4 (2009), 467–97.

Pasternack, Lawrence, "The *Ens Realissimum* and Necessary Being in the *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001), 467–74.

Pasternack, Lawrence, "The Development and Scope of Kantian Belief: The Highest Good, the Practical Postulates, and the Fact of Reason," *Kant-Studien* 102.3 (2011a), 290–315.

Pasternack, Lawrence, "Kant's Doctrinal Belief in God," *Rethinking Kant* 3 (2011b), 200–18.

Pasternack, Lawrence, *Kant on Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (London: Routledge, 2014).

Pasternack, Lawrence, "Restoring Kant's Conception of the Highest Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55.3 (2017), 435–68.

Pasternack, Lawrence/ Fugate, Courtney, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (summer 2022 ed.), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/kant-religion/, last access July 1, 2023.

Pasternack, Lawrence/ Rossi, Philip, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-religion/ (2014), last access October 6, 2016.

Paulsen, Friedrich, *Immanuel Kant. Sein Leben und seine Lehre* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1904, 4th ed.).

Plantinga, Alvin, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

Plantinga, Alvin, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974)

Plato, "Timaeus," in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1224–91.

Pollok, Konstantin, "'Fabricating a World in Accordance with Mere Fantasy ...?'—The Origins of Kant's Critical Theory of Matter," *The Review of Metaphysics* 56.1 (2002), 61–97.

Pollok, Konstantin, *Kant's Theory of Normativity: Exploring the Space of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Proops, Ian, "Kant on the Cosmological Argument," *Philosophers Imprint* 14 (2014), 1–21.

Proops, Ian, "Kant on the Ontological Argument," *Nous* 49.1 (2015), 1–27.

Pruss, Alexander/ Rasmussen, Joshua, *Necessary Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Ray, John, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation Being the Substance of Some Common Places Delivered in the Chappel of Trinity-College, in Cambridge* (London: Printed for Samuel Smith, 1691).

Reath, Andrews, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988), 593–619.

Redmann, Horst-Günter, *Gott und Welt: Die Schöpfungstheologie der vorkritischen Periode Kants* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

Reimarus, Samuel, *Abhandlungen von den vornehmsten Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion* (Tübingen: Frank & Schramm, 1754, 1782, 5th ed.).

Reinhardt, Olaf, "Editor's Introduction," in *Natural Science*, ed. by Eric Watkins, trans. by Lewis White Beck, Jeffrey Edwards, Olaf Reinhardt, Martin Schönfeld, and Eric Watkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 182–7.

Reinhold, Karl Leonhard (1786), *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, ed. by Raymund Schmidt (Leipzig: Reclam, 1923).

Rödl, Sebastian, "Why Ought Implies Can," in *Kant on Practical Justification*, ed. by Mark Timmons and Sorin Baiasu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42–56.

Rohlf, Michael, "Immanuel Kant," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall 2020 ed.), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/kant/, last access November 1, 2020.

Sala, Giovanni B., *Kant und die Frage nach Gott: Gottesbeweise und Gottesbeweiskritik in den Schriften Kants* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1990).

Sala, Giovanni B., *Kants* Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. *Ein Kommentar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004).

Sammons, Jeffrey L., *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

Schaffer, Jerome, "Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument," *Mind* 71.283 (1962), 307–25.

Schmalenbach, Herman, *Kants Religion* (Berlin: Junker and Dünnhaupt, 1929).

Schmucker, Joseph, *Die Ontotheologie des vorkritischen Kant* (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1980).

Schmucker, Joseph, *Kants vorkritische Kritik der Gottesbeweise* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983).

Schönfeld, Martin, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Sensen, Oliver, "The Supreme Principle of Morality," in *Kant as Lecturer,* ed. by Robert Clewis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 179–99.

Sensen, Oliver, "Kant on Individual Moral Progress," in *The Possibility of Progress*, ed. by Paul Wilford/ Sam Stoner (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 19–29.

Sensen, Oliver, "The 'Dialectic' of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason,*" in *Kantian Minds*, ed. by Sorin Baiasu and Mark Timmons (London: Routledge, 2023), 178–88.

Shea, William R., "Filled With Wonder: Kant's Cosmological Essay, the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*," in *Kant's Philosophy of Physical Science: Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft 1786–1986*, ed. by Robert E. Butts (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986), 95–124.

Sherkat, Darren, "Religious Socialization: Sources of Influence and Influences of Agency," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. by Michele Dillion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151–63.

Silber, John, "The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant's Ethics," *Ethics* 73 (1963), 179–97.

Smith, Donald, "Kant on the Dependency of the Cosmological Argument on the Ontological Argument," *European Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2003), 206–18.

Smith, Tom, "Beliefs about God across Time and Countries," *NORC at the University of Chicago*, 2012, retrieved from https://gss.norc.org/Documents/reports/cross-national-reports/Godissp.pdf.

Stang, Nicholas F., "Kant's Possibility Proof," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.3 (2010), 275–99.

Stang, Nicholas F., "Kant's Argument that Existence is not a Determination," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 41 (2015), 583–626.

Stang, Nicholas F., *Kant's Modal Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Stevenson, Leslie, "Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge," *Kantian Review* 7 (2003), 72–100.

Sussman, David, "The Highest Good: Who Needs it?," in *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, ed. by Joachim Aufderheide and Ralf Bader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 214–28.

Swinburne, Richard, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, 2004, 2nd ed.).

Theis, Robert, *Gott: Untersuchung zur Entwicklung des theologischen Diskurses in Kants Schriften zur theoretischen Philosophie bis hin zum Erscheinen der "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1994).

Theis, Robert, "Kants frühe Theologie und ihre Beziehungen zur Wolffschen Philosophie," in *Die Gottesfrage in der Philosophie Immanuel Kants*, ed. by Norbert Fischer and Maximilian Forschner (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 17–42.

Vaihinger, Hans, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1911).

Vallicella, William, "Does the Cosmological Argument Depend on the Ontological?," *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000), 441–58.

van Cleve, James, *Problems from Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Waschkies, Hans-Joachim, *Physik und Physikotheologie des jungen Kant: Die Vorgeschichte seiner Allgemeinen Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987).

Watkins, Eric, "The Antinomy of Practical Reason: Reason, the Unconditioned and the Highest Good," in *Kant's* Critique of Practical Reason. *A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145–67.

Watkins, Eric, "The Early Kant's (Anti-)Newtonianism," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 44 (2013), 429–37.

Willaschek, Marcus, *Praktische Vernunft* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992).

Willaschek, Marcus, "The Primacy of Practical Reason and the Idea of a Practical Postulate," in *Kant's* Critique of Practical Reason. *A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168–96.

Wolff, Christian (1720), *Vernünftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, ed. by Charles Corr (Hildesheim: Olms, 1983, 7th ed.), vol. 3.

Wolff, Christian (1736), *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia* [*Ontologia*] (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1977).

Wolff, Christian (1740), *Philosophia rationalis sive Logica* [*Logica*] (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1983).

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

Wood, Allen W., "Kant's Deism," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. by Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1–21.

Wood, Allen W., *Kant and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Wright, Thomas, *Original Theory Or New Hypothesis of the Universe, Founded Upon the Laws of Nature, and Solving by Mathematical Principles the General Phaenomena of the Visible Creation and Particularly the Via Lactea* (London: Chapelle, 1750).

Yolton, John W., *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

Yong, Peter, "God, Totality and Possibility in Kant's Only Possible Argument," *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014), 27–51.

Contributers

Uygar Abaci is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of *Kant's Revolutionary Theory of Modality* (2019). His articles include "Noumenal Freedom and Kant's Modal Antinomy" (2022), "Kant, the Actualist Principle, and the Fate of the Only Possible Proof" (2017), "The Coextensiveness Thesis and Kant's Modal Agnosticism in the 'Postulates'" (2016), "Kant's Elliptical Path" (2014), "Kant's Only Possible Argument and Chignell's Real Harmony" (2014), and "Kant's Theses on Existence" (2008).

Craig Bacon is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of South Carolina. In addition to his dissertation, *The Life of Virtue: Moral Progress and Kant's Idea of the Highest Good*, he is the author of "On the Coherence of Postulating God in Kant's First and Second *Critique*" (2018).

Andrew Chignell is Laurance S. Rockefellor Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University, with appointments in Religion, Philosophy, and the University Center for Human Values. He is currently writing a book *Knowledge and Belief in Kant: Making Room for Practical Metaphysics*, and has edited, among others, the volume *Evil. A History* (2019), and co-edited *God and the Ethics of Belief* (2005). He has written numerous articles on Kant's theoretical philosophy and aesthetics, and on contemporary epistemology, ethics, and philosophy of religion. His articles on Kant's religious and moral philosophy include "Demoralization and Hope: Psychological Reading of Kant's Moral Argument" (2023), "Hope and Despair at the Kantian Chicken Factory: Moral Arguments about Making a Difference" (2020), "Rational Hope, Possibility, and Divine Action" (2014), "Kant and the 'Monstrous' Ground of Possibility: A Reply to Abaci and Yong" (2014), "Rational Hope, Moral Order, and the Revolution of the Will" (2013), "Kant, Real Possibility, and the Threat of Spinoza" (2012), "Real Repugnance and Belief about Things in Themselves" (2010), "Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being" (2009), and "Belief in Kant" (2007).

Eckart Förster is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, German, and Comparative Thought and Literature at Johns Hopkins University and Honorary Professor of Philosophy at Humboldt University, Berlin. He has published widely on Kant, especially on Kant's *Opus postumum*, on Goethe, Hölderlin, and German Idealism. He is the author of *Grenzen der Erkenntnis? Untersuchungen zu Kant und dem Deutschen Idealismus* (2022), *Reflexionen des Geistes in Philosophie und Kunst* (2021), *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie/ The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy* (2011/ 2017), and *Kant's Final Synthesis* (2000), and has edited the volumes *Kant's* Opus postumum (1993), *Kant's Transcendental Deductions. The Three* Critiques *and the* Opus postumum (1989), and has co-edited *Spinoza and German Idealism* (2012). His articles include "Kant's *Opus postumum*" (2021), "Eine systematische Rekonstruktion?" (2013), "Grenzen der Erkenntnis" (2013), "What is 'The Highest Point of Transcendental Philosophy'?" (2010), "The Hidden Plan of Nature" (2009), "Die Bedeutung von §§ 76, 77 der *Kritik der Urteilskraft* für die Entwicklung der nachkantischen Philosophie (Teil 1, Teil 2)" (2002, 2002), and "Die Wandlungen in Kants Gotteslehre" (1998).

Ina Goy is Professor of the History of Western Philosophy at Beijing Normal University. She is author of *Kants Theorie der Biologie. Ein Kommentar. Eine Lesart. Eine historische Einordnung* (2017), editor of *Kant on Proofs for God's Existence* (2023), and co-editor of *Kant's Theory of Biology* (2014). Her articles on Kant's philosophy of religion include "Kant on Non-Human Animals and God" (2020), ""… wie dich selbst". Kant über Liebe und Selbst-Liebe im Liebesgebot" (2016), "The Antinomy of Teleological

Judgment" (2015), "Über Liebe. Kants Auseinandersetzung mit den biblischen Geboten der Gottes-liebe, der Nächstenliebe und der Selbstliebe" (2014), "Kant's Theory of Biology and the Argument from Design" (2014).

Paul Guyer is Jonathan Nelson Professor Emeritus of Humanities and Philosophy at Brown University. He has published widely on all aspects of Kant's philosophy. His books on Kant include *Reason and Experience in Mendelssohn and Kant* (2020), *Kant on the Rationality of Morality* (2019), *Kant* (2014, 2nd ed.), *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (2005), *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (2000), *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (1993), *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (1987), and *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (1979). He is the editor of *Kant's* Critique of the Power of Judgment: *Critical Essays* (2003) as well as three Cambridge Companions on Kant. He is the editor and co-translator of Kant's *Notes and Fragments* (2005), Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (2000), and the first *Critique* (1998) in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, of which he was General Co-Editor from 1986 to 2016. He has recently completed *The Legacy of Kant in Moral Philosophy.* He is also the author of *A Philosopher Looks at Architecture* (2021) and *A History of Modern Aesthetics* (2014, 3 vols.).

Graham Oppy is Professor of Philosophy at Monash University. His books include *Atheism: The Basics* (2019), *Atheism and Agnosticism* (2018), *Describing Gods: An Investigation of Divine Attributes* (2014), *The Best Argument Against* God (2013), and *Arguing About Gods* (2006). He is co-author of *Is There a God? A Debate* (2022), editor of *A Companion to Atheism and Philosophy* (2019), *Ontological Arguments* (2018), and *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (2015), and has co-edited the volumes *Interreligious Philosophical Dialogues* (2018, 3 vols.), and *History of Western Philosophy of Religion* (2009, 5 vols.). His has written numerous articles on arguments for and against the existence of God.

Lara Ostaric is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Temple University. She is author of the monograph *The* Critique of Judgment *and the Unity of Kant's Critical System* (2023), and she is editor of the volume *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays* (2014). Her articles include "Regaining Subjectivity in Absolute Freedom: Schelling's Ontological Extension of Kant's Radical Evil in the *Freiheitsschrift*" (forthcoming), "Practical Cognition, Reflective Judgment, and the Realism of Kant's Moral *Glaube*" (2017), "Kant on the Normativity of Creative Production" (2012), "Works of Genius as Sensible Exhibitions of the Idea of the Highest Good" (2010), and "Kant's Account of Nature's Systematicity and the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason" (2009).

Stephen Palmquist is an independent scholar living in Los Angeles, having served as Professor of Religion and Philosophy at various universities in Hong Kong from 1987 to 2021. He is the author of *Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason's Light* (2019), *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's* Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason (2016), *Introduction to Immanuel Kant's* Religion within the Boundaries of Bare Reason (2009), and *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (2000). He has edited the volumes *Kant on Intuition: Western and Asian Perspectives on Transcendental Idealism* (2018), *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy* (2010), and has co-edited *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (2006). His numerous articles include "How is Religious Experience Possible? On the (Quasi-Transcendental) Mode of Arguments in Kant's *Religion*" (2022), "Responses to Critics: What Makes Mysticism Critical?" (2021), "What is Kantian *Gesinnung*? On the Priority of Volition over Metaphysics and Psychology in Kant's *Religion*" (2015), "Could Kant's Jesus Be God?" (2012), "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God—

The Ultimate Dependence of Human Destiny on Divine Assistance" (2009), and "Kant's Quasi-Transcendental Argument for a Necessary and Universal Evil Propensity in Human Nature" (2008).

Lawrence Pasternack is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Religious Studies at Oklahoma State University. He is author of *Kant's* Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: *An Interpretation and Defense* (2014), *Immanuel Kant's* Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: *In Focus* (2002), is the series co-editor of *Immanuel Kant's Sources in Translation*, which includes volumes on Achenwall (2020), Baumgarten (2020), Eberhard (2016), and Meier (2016), and is co-editor of *Pascal's Wager* (2018). His articles include "Immediate Experience, Mystical 'Encounters', and the 'Voice' of God: Palmquist's Critical Mysticism and Kant's Theory of Experience" (2021), "On the Alleged Augustinianism in Kant's *Religion*" (2020), "Kant's Fourfold Critique of the Ontological Argument: Containment, Predication, and the Wisdom of Free Logic" (2018), "Rational Faith and the Pantheism Controversy: Kant's "Orientation" Essay and the Evolution of his Moral Argument" (2018, co-authored), and "Restoring Kant's Conception of the Highest Good (2017).

Konstantin Pollok is Professor of Philosophy at Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz. He is author of *Kant's Theory of Normativity: Exploring the Space of Reason* (2017), *Begründen und Rechtfertigen. Eine Untersuchung zum Verhältnis zwischen rationalen Erfordernissen und prävalenten Handlungsgründen* (2009), and *Kants* Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft. *Ein kritischer Kommentar* (2001). He has published the critical editions *Immanuel Kant.* Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können (2001) and *Immanuel Kant.* Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft (1997). He has co-edited *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism* (2021). His articles include "Is Kant's Ethics Metaphysically Naturalistic? Comments on Frederick Rauscher's *Naturalism and Realism in Kant's Ethics*" (2017), "'The Understanding Prescribes Laws to Nature': Spontaneity, Legislation, and Kant's Transcendental Hylomorphism" (2014), "From the Clarity of Ideas to the Validity of Judgments: Kant's Farewell to Epistemic Perfectionism" (2014), "'Wenn Vernunft volle Gewalt über das Begehrungsvermögen hätte'—Über die gemeinsame Wurzel der Kantischen Imperative" (2008), "Kant's Critical Concepts of Motion" (2006), and "'Fabricating a World in Accordance with Mere Fantasy ...?'—The Origins of Kant's Critical Theory of Matter" (2002).

Oliver Sensen is Associate Professor at University of Tulane. He is the author of the books *Human Dignity* (forthcoming) and *Kant on Human Dignity* (2011). He is editor of the volume *Kant on Moral Autonomy* (2013), and co-editor of *Respect* (2021), *The Emergence of Autonomy in Kant's Moral Theory* (2018), *Kant's Lectures on Ethics: A Critical Guide* (2015) and *Kant's* Tugendlehre. *A Commentary* (2012). His articles include "Universal Law and Poverty Relief" (2022), "How to Treat Someone with Respect" (2022), "Kant on Human Dignity Reconsidered" (2015), "Kant on Duties Towards Other Human Beings from Respect" (2013), "Kant's Conception of Inner Value" (2011), "Human Dignity in Historical Perspective: The Contemporary and Traditional Paradigms" (2011), "Dignity and the Formula of Humanity" (2010), and "Kant's Conception of Human Dignity" (2009).

Allen Wood is Ruth Norman Halls Professor of Philosophy at Bloomington University and Ward W. and Priscilla B. Woods Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Stanford University. His books on Kant include *Kant and Religion* (2020), *Formulas of the Moral Law* (2017), *Kantian Ethics* (2007), *Kant* (2004), *Kant's Ethical Thought* (1999), *Kant's Rational Theology* (1978), and *Kant's Moral Religion* (1970). He has co-authored *Introducing Kant's* Critique of Pure Reason (2021) and *Immanuel Kant's* Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: *A Commentary* (2015), and is co-editor and co-translator of *Kant. Writings*

on Religion and Rational Theology (1996) and *Kant. Lectures on Philosophical Theology* (1978). His articles on Kant's philosophy of religion include "The Evil in Human Nature" (2014), "Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil" (2000), "Kant on Religion and Rational Theology" (2000), "Kant's Criticism of the Three Theistic Proofs" (1998), "Kant's Deism" (1992), "Rational Theology, Moral Faith and Religion" (1991), and "The Immorality of Moral Faith" (1989).

Index of Names

Index of Subjects

actualism   47, 67, 77, 263
actuality   5, 14, 44–5, 57–8, 60, 62, 64, 75–6,
    80, 84, 86, 118, 186, 219, 243, 255–6, 261–
    3, 270
aggregate   51–2, 259
agnosticism   10, 21, 139, 143, 185
analytic   3, 11, 66, 81, 144, 163, 192, 194, 197,
    199–200, 248–51
anthropomorphism   88, 180, 211
antinomy   10, 71–5, 78, 83–5, 98, 113, 143–4,
    176, 187, 215
– cosmological ~   72
– fourth ~   71, 73–5, 78, 83–5
– third ~   73–4, 143
archetype   9–10, 168–70, 172, 176
architect   30, 79
argument   *passim* 1–15, 21, 25–6, 28, 30–2,
    34–7, 41–3, 45, 47–54, 61, 63, 65, 67, 69–72,
    76–86, 88–9, 93–4, 97–8, 104–10, 118–9,
    122, 124–6, 129, 133, 139–46, 148, 150, 153–
    5, 157–8, 161–3, 165–7, 169–70, 172–3, 179,
    185, 188, 192–4, 205–8, 210–13, 216–21,
    223–36, 238–41, 243, 245, 247–50, 252–3,
    255, 257–8, 267–75, 277, 279–83
– cosmological ~, see also proof, cosmological
    11–13, 69–71, 78, 82–4, 207, 212, *passim*
    223–42
– design ~, ~ from design, see also proof, physi-
    co-theological   6, 30, 32, 70, 85, 124, 126,
    passim 205–22
– ethicotheological ~, see also argument, moral,
    see also proof, moral   12, 216
– moral ~, see also argument, ethicotheological,
    see also proof, moral   2–3, 8–9, 11–12,
    15, 36–7, 119, 129, 133, 139–48, 150, 153–5,
    157–8, 162–3, 169, *passim* 267–84
– ontological ~, see also proof, ontological   3,
    11–13, 41, 50, 69–70, 77–85, 126, 212, 223–
    4, 226–8, 233, 240, 244
– physico-theological ~, see also argument, de-
    sign, see also proof, physico-theological
    2–3, 11–13, 70, 78–9, 86, 119, 125, *passim*
    205–22

as if (*als-ob*)   63, 87–8, 112, 130, 140–1, 157–8,
    161, 166, 171, 174, 176, 179, 200, 218
assent, see also holding-for-true (*Fürwahrhalten*)
    6, 8–9, 15, 66, 92, 129, 131–2, 134, 145, 152,
    157, 267, 269–73, 277–8, 281–3
author   10, 20, 30–1, 36–7, 70, 86, 126, 129,
    132, 146, 151, 175, 177, 186–9, 195, 199–200,
    212, 272
attraction, see also repulsion   4–5, 21, 23, 26,
    28–9, 194, 214

being   *passim* 2, 5–8, 10–14, 23–5, 34–5, 41–3,
    45–6, 48–51, 53–67, 73–80, 82–6, 90–1, 97–
    103, 108–9, 113, 117–23, 125–9, 132–6, 140,
    142–4, 149, 155, 157, 161–74, 177–82, 185–
    91, 195–201, 208–16, 218, 220, 223–6, 228–
    41, 245–50, 256–8, 260, 262–3, 267, 271,
    273–4, 276–7, 279–80
– divine ~   54, 126, 169, 185, 188, 211, 225–6
– human ~   7, 10–11, 58, 82, 91, 98, 100–3,
    108–9, 118–21, 128–9, 132–5, 140, 149, 155,
    161–74, 177–80, 182, 185, 188–91, 195–6,
    198, 200, 210, 214, 271, 273–4, 277, 279–80
– moral ~   11, 121, 126, 128, 136, 163, 173, 181,
    189, 198–200, 274
– most real ~, see also *ens realissimum*   6, 14,
    42–3, 56, 60, 84–5, 125, 225, 230, 235–40,
    245, 250, 267
– necessary ~, see also *ens necessarium*   5, 13,
    42, 51, 62–3, 73–6, 78–80, 82–6, 125, 197,
    223–6, 228–33, 235–6, 238–41, 246, 248–9,
    257
– perfect ~, see also *ens perfectissimum*   43,
    76, 78–80, 83–5, 223–4, 245
– rational ~   7, 11, 35, 90–1, 97, 99, 101, 103,
    119, 121, 123, 186–7, 195–7, 199–200, 220,
    274, 276
belief, Belief   1–2, 5–6, 9, 32–3, 36, 65–6, 69–
    72, 87, 89, 91–3, 112, 140, 142, 144–6, 151,
    153–5, 157, 162, 167–8, 170, 173, 175, 182,
    238, 267–8, 270–2, 277, 281–3
– doctrinal ~   66, 151, 281–2
– moral ~   92, 271, 277, 281–3